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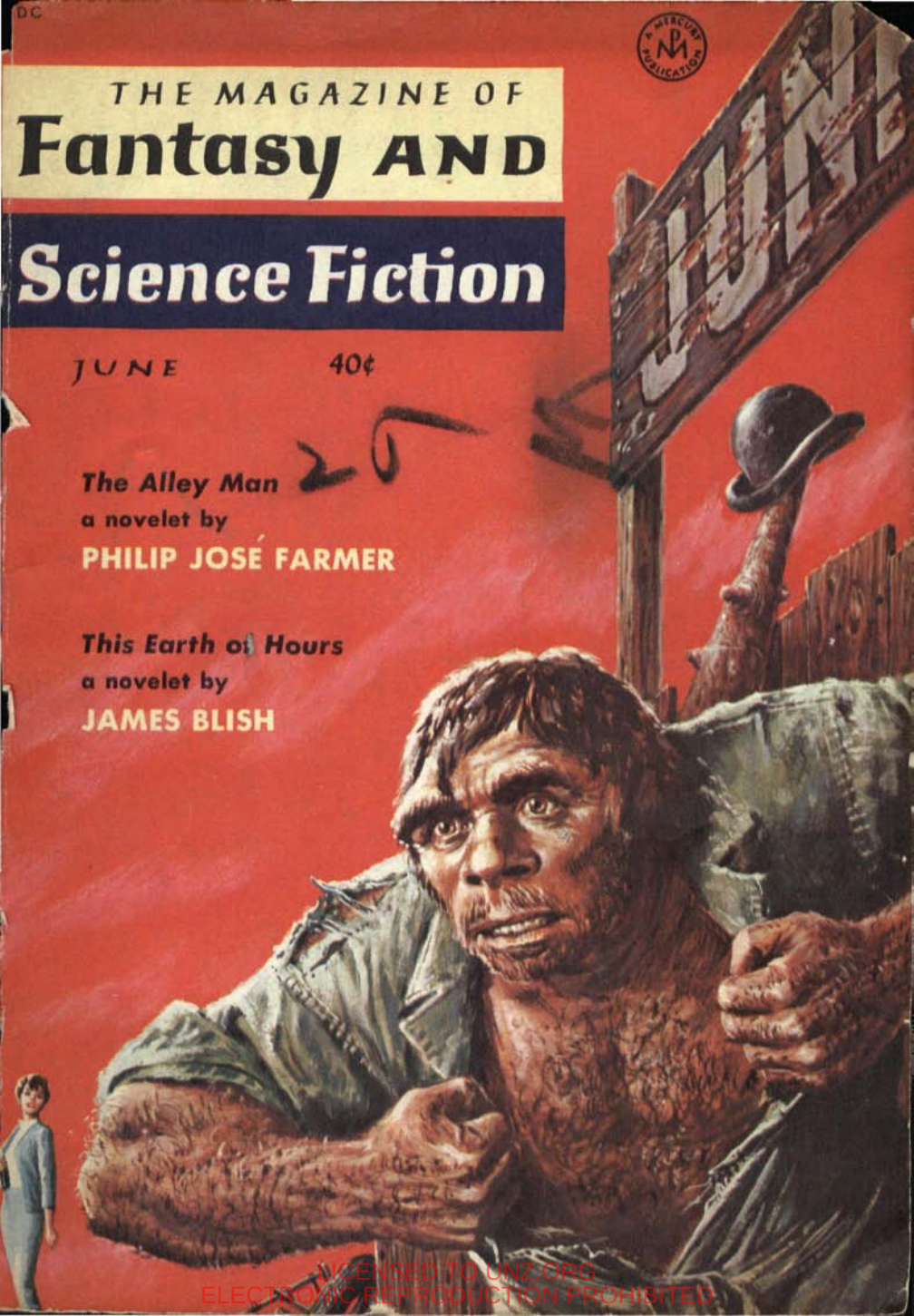
The Alley Man
a novelet by
PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

This Earth of Hours
a novelet by
JAMES BLISH



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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 16, No. 6 JUNE

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Cover by Emsh, illustrating "The Alley Man"

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In this issue . . .

James Blish has been too long absent from these pages—we are delighted to have him back, together with his special talent for wrapping compelling narrative around sound, and imaginative, science. . . . Philip José Farmer's ideas and style are such that his stories not uncommonly stir up violent controversy, and we suspect that such will be the case with "The Alley Man." Incidentally, Emsh's cover illustration of this story shows Old Man Paley before he lost his arm in order to convey more effectively the Neanderthal impact; this for the benefit of the False Folk among you. . . . Charles G. Finney published his first short story, in these pages, last August; since then, he has published four or five others, including "The Iowan's Curse," in Harper's, which we have just been notified will be included in Martha Foley's next Best Short Stories of the Year. A distinguished record —but hardly astonishing for the author of THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO. . . . *Not* in this issue is Damon Knight's Book column, missing because Mr. Knight did not receive enough interesting new books this last month to warrant, in his opinion, use of his usual space. He will definitely be back next month, however. . . .

Coming soon . . .

Robert F. Young, whose last lengthy work here was the memorable "Goddess in Granite" (F&SF, Sept. 1957), once more tackles a truly king-size subject in the novelet "To Fell a Tree." Those of you who joined us in hoping that Howard Fast's "Of Time and Cats" in our March issue would not be his last short science fiction, will be pleased to know that two more fine examples of Fastiana have arrived, and will be on public view here shortly. A number of readers have asked urgently that Zenna Henderson be persuaded to write more stories of the People; there is, at this writing, nothing new on that front, but we do have a new story from Miss Henderson which bears her unmistakable stamp. Also, there will be novelets by Clifford Simak, Mark Clifton, Edward S. Aarons —*and*, a special feature coming up this fall will be Robert A. Heinlein's newest novel, "Starship Soldier." Best fill in the coupon on page 128 instanter.

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The blow from the strange planet had been undetectable until it struck, and then most of the invasion fleet was annihilated. The handful of men that landed safely had two problems: They must discover the true nature of the incredible natives, and then, somehow, get a warning back to Earth. . . .

THIS EARTH OF HOURS

by James Blish

I

THE ADVANCE SQUADRON WAS coming into line as Master Sargent Oberholzer came onto the bridge of the *Novoe Washingtongrad,* saluted, and stood stiffly to the left of Lt. Campion, the exec, to wait for orders. The bridge was crowded and crackling with tension, but after twenty years in the Marines it was all old stuff to Oberholzer. The *Hobo* (as most of the enlisted men called her, out of earshot of the brass) was at the point of the formation, as befitted a virtually indestructible battleship already surfeited with these petty conquests. The rest of the cone was sweeping on ahead, in the swift enveloping maneuver which had reduced so many previous planets before they had been able to understand what was happening to them.

This time, the planet at the focus of all those shifting conic sections of raw naval power was a place called Callë. It was showing now on a screen that Oberholzer could see, turning as placidly as any planet turned when you were too far away from it to see what guns it might be poi. ng at you. Lt. Campion was watching it too, though he had to look out of the very corners of his eyes to see it at all.

If the exec were caught watching the screen instead of the meter-board assigned to him, Capt. Hammer would probably reduce him to an ensign. Nevertheless, Campion never took his eyes off the image of Callë. This one was going to be rough.

Capt. Hammer was watching, too. After a moment, in a voice like sandpaper he said, "Sound!"

"By the pulse six, Sir," Lt. Spring's voice murmured from the direction of the 'scope. His junior,

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a raw youngster named Rover, passed him a chit from the plotting table. "For that read: By the briefs five eight nine, Sir," the invisible navigator corrected.

Oberholzer listened without moving while Capt. Hammer muttered under his breath to Flo-Mar 12-Upjohn, the only civilian allowed on the bridge—and small wonder, since he was the Consort of State of the Matriarchy itself. Hammer had long ago become accustomed enough to his own bridge to be able to control who overheard him, but 12-Upjohn's answering whisper must have been audible to every man there.

"The briefing said nothing about a second inhabited planet," the Consort said, a little peevishly. "But then there's very little we *do* know about this system—that's part of our trouble. What makes you think it's a colony?"

"A colony from Callë, not one of ours," Hammer said, in more or less normal tones; evidently he had decided against trying to keep only half of the discussion private. "The electromagnetic 'noise' from both planets has the same spectrum—the energy level, the output, is higher on Callë, that's all. That means similar machines being used in similar ways. And let me point out, Your Excellency, that the outer planet is in opposition to Callë now, which will put it precisely in our rear if we complete this manuever."

"When we complete this maneuver," 12-Upjohn said firmly. "Is there any evidence of communication between the two planets?"

Hammer frowned. "No," he admitted.

"Then we'll regard the colonization hypothesis as unproved—and stand ready to strike back hard if events prove us wrong. I think we have a sufficient force here to reduce *three* planets like Callë if we're driven to that pitch."

Hammer grunted and resigned the argument. Of course it was quite possible that 12-Upjohn was right; he did not lack for experience—in fact, he wore the Silver Earring; as the most-travelled Consort of State ever to ride the Standing Wave. Nevertheless Oberholzer repressed a sniff with difficulty. Like all the military, he was a colonial; he had never seen the Earth, and never expected to; and both as a colonial, and as a Marine who had been fighting the Matriarchy's battles all his adult life, he was more than a little contemptuous of Earthmen, with their tandem names and all that they implied. Of course it was not the Consort of State's fault that he had been born on Earth, and so had been named only Marvin 12 out of the misfortune of being a male; nor that he had married into Florence Upjohn's cabinet, that being the only way one could

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become a cabinet member, and Marvin 12 having been taught from birth to believe such a post the highest honor a man might covet. All the same, neither 12-Upjohn nor his entourage of drones filled Oberholzer with confidence.

Nobody, however, had asked M. Sgt. Richard Oberholzer what he thought, and nobody was likely to. As the chief of all the non-Navy enlisted personnel on board the *Hobo*, he was expected to be on the bridge when matters were ripening toward a crisis; but his duty there was to listen, not to proffer advice. He could not in fact remember any occasion when an officer had asked his opinion, though he had received—and executed—his fair share of near-suicidal orders from bridges long demolished.

"By the pulse five point five," Lt. Spring's voice sang.

"Sergeant Oberholzer," Hammer said.

"Aye, Sir."

"We are proceeding as per orders. You may now brief your men and put them into full battle gear."

Oberholzer saluted and went below. There was little enough he could tell the squad—as 12-Upjohn had said, Callë's system was nearly unknown—but even that little would improve the total ignorance in which they had been kept till now. Luckily, they were not much given to asking questions of a strategic sort; like impressed spacehands everywhere, the huge mass of the Matriarchy's interstellar holdings meant nothing to them but endlessly riding the Standing Wave, with battle and death lurking at the end of every jump. Luckily also, they were inclined to trust Oberholzer, if only for the low cunning he had shown in keeping most of them alive, especially in the face of unusually Crimean orders from the bridge.

This time Oberholzer would need every ounce of trust and erg of obedience they would give him. Though he never expected anything but the worst, he had a queer cold feeling that this time he was going to get it. There were hardly any data to go on yet, but there had been something about Callë that looked persuasively like the end of the line.

Very few of the forty men in the wardroom even looked up as Oberholzer entered. They were checking their gear in the dismal light of the fluorescents, with the single-mindedness of men to whom a properly wound gun-tube coil, a properly set face-shield gasket, a properly fuelled and focussed vaulting jet have come to mean more than parents, children, retirement pensions, the rule of law or the logic of empire. The only man to show any flicker of interest was Sgt. Cassirir—as

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was normal, since he was Oberholzer's understudy—and he did no more than look up from over the straps of his anti-gas suit and say, "Well?"

"Well," Oberholzer said, "now hear this."

There was a sort of composite jingle and clank as the men lowered their gear to the deck or put it aside on their bunks.

"We're investing a planet called Callë in the Canes Venatici cluster," Oberholzer said, sitting down on an olive-drab canvas pack stuffed with lysurgic acid grenades. "A cruiser called the *Dragon*—you were with her on her shakedown, weren't you, Himber?—touched down here ten years ago with a flock of tenders and got swallowed up. They got two or three quick yells for help out and that was that—nothing anybody could make much sense of, no weapons named or description of the enemy. So here we are, loaded for the kill."

"Wasn't any Calley in command of the *Dragon* when I was aboard," Himber said doubtfully.

"Nah. Place was named for the astronomer who spotted her, from the rim of the cluster, a hundred years ago," Oberholzer said. "Nobody names planets for ship captains. Anybody got any sensible questions?"

"Just what kind of trouble are we looking for?" Cassirir said.

"That's just it—we don't know. This is closer to the center of the Galaxy than we've ever gotten before. It may be a population center too; could be that Callë is just one piece of a federation, at least inside its own cluster. That's why we've got the boys from Momma on board; this one could be damn important."

Somebody sniffed. "If this cluster is full of people, how come we never picked up signals from it?"

"How do you know we never did?" Oberholzer retorted. "For all I know, maybe that's why the *Dragon* came here in the first place. Anyhow that's not our problem. All we're—"

The lights went out. Simultaneously, the whole mass of the *Novoe Washingtongrad* shuddered savagely, as though a boulder almost as big as she was had been dropped on her.

Seconds later, the gravity went out too.

II

Flo-Mar 12-Upjohn knew no more of the real nature of the disaster than did the wardroom squad, nor did anybody on the bridge, for that matter. The blow had been undetectable until it struck, and then most of the fleet was simply annihilated; only the *Hobo* was big enough to survive the blow, and she survived only partially—in fact, in five pieces. Nor did the Consort of State ever

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know by what miracle the section he was in hit Callë still partially under power; he was not privy to the self-salvaging engineering principles of battleships. All he knew—once he struggled back to consciousness—was that he was still alive, and that there was a broad shaft of sunlight coming through a split in what had been his office aboard ship.

He held his ringing head for a while, then got up in search of water. Nothing came out of the dispenser, so he unstrapped his dispatch case from the underside of his desk and produced a pint palladium flask of vodka. He had screwed up his face to sample this —at the moment he would have preferred water—when a groan reminded him that there might be more than one room in his suddenly shrunken universe, as well as other survivors.

He was right on both counts. Though the ship section he was in consisted mostly of engines of whose function he had no notion, there were also three other staterooms. Two of these were deserted, but the third turned out to contain a battered member of his own staff, by name Robin One.

The young man was not yet conscious and 12-Upjohn regarded him with a faint touch of despair. Robin One was perhaps the last man in space that the Consort of State would have chosen to be shipwrecked with.

That he was utterly expendable went without saying; he was, after all, a drone. When the perfection of sperm electrophoresis had enabled parents for the first time to pre-determine the sex of their children, the predictable result had been an enormous glut of males—which was directly accountable for the present regime on Earth. By the time the people and the lawmakers, thoroughly frightened by the crazy years of fashion upheavals, "beefcake", polyandry, male prostitution and all the rest, had come to their senses, the Matriarchy was in to stay; a weak electric current had overturned civilized society as drastically as the steel knife had demoralized the Eskimos.

Though the tide of excess males had since receded somewhat, it had left behind a wrack, of which Robin One was a bubble. He was a drone, and hence superfluous by definition—fit only to be sent colonizing, on diplomatic missions or otherwise thrown away.

Superfluity alone, of course, could hardly account for his presence on 12-Upjohn's staff. Officially, Robin One was an interpreter; actually—since nobody could know the language the Consort of State might be called upon to understand on this mission—he was a poet, a class of unattached males with special privileges in the Matriarchy, particularly if

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what they wrote was of the middling-difficult or Hillyer Society sort. Robin One was an eminently typical member of this class, distractable, sulky, jealous, easily wounded, homosexual, lazy except when writing, and probably (to give him the benefit of the doubt, for 12-Upjohn had no ear whatever for poetry) the second-worst poet of his generation.

It had to be admitted that assigning 12-Upjohn a poet as an interpreter on this mission had not been a wholly bad idea, and that if Hildegard Muller of the Interstellar Understanding Commission had not thought of it, no mere male would have been likely to—least of all Bar-Rob 4-Agberg, Director of Assimilation. The nightmare of finding the whole of the center of the Galaxy organized into one vast federation, much older than Earth's, had been troubling the State Department for a long time, at first from purely theoretical considerations—all those heart-stars were much older than those in the spiral arms, and besides, where star density in space is so much higher, interstellar travel does not look like quite so insuperable an obstacle as it long had to Earthmen—and later from certain practical signs, of which the obliteration of the *Dragon* and her tenders had been only the most provocative. Getting along with these people on the first contact would be vital, and yet the language barrier might well provoke a tragedy wanted by neither side, as the obliteration of Nagasaki in World War II had been provoked by the mis-translation of a single word. Under such circumstances, a man with a feeling for strange words in odd relationships might well prove to be useful, or even vital.

Nevertheless, it was with a certain grim enjoyment that 12-Upjohn poured into Robin One a good two-ounce jolt of vodka. Robin coughed convulsively and sat up, blinking.

"Your Excellency—how—what's happened? I thought we were dead. But we've got lights again, and gravity."

He was observant, that had to be granted. "The lights are ours but the gravity is Callé's," 12-Upjohn explained tersely. "We're in a part of the ship that cracked up."

"Well, it's good that we've got power."

"We can't afford to be philosophical about it. Whatever shape it's in, this derelict is a thoroughly conspicuous object and we'd better get out of it in a hurry."

"Why?" Robin said. "We were supposed to make contact with these people. Why not just sit here until they come to see us?"

"Suppose they just blast us to smaller bits instead? They didn't stop to parley with the fleet, you'll notice."

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"This is a different situation," Robin said stubbornly. "I wouldn't have stopped to parley with that fleet myself, if I'd had the means of knocking it out first. It didn't look a bit like a diplomatic mission. But why should they be afraid of a piece of a wreck?"

The Consort of State stroked the back of his neck reflectively. The boy had a point. It was risky; on the other hand, how long would they survive foraging in completely unknown territory? And yet obviously they couldn't stay cooped up in here forever—especially if it was true that there was already no water.

He was spared having to make up his mind by a halloo from the direction of the office. After a startled stare at each other, the two hit the deck running.

Sgt. Oberholzer's face was peering grimly through the split in the bulkhead.

"Oho," he said. "So you *did* make it." He said something unintelligible to some invisible person outside, and then squirmed through the breach into the room, with considerable difficulty, since he was in full battle gear. "None of the officers did, so I guess that puts you in command."

"In command of what?" 12-Upjohn said drily.

"Not very much," the Marine admitted. "I've got five men surviving, one of them with a broken hip, and a section of the ship with two drive units in it. It would lift, more or less, if we could jury-rig some controls, but I don't know where we'd go in it without supplies or a navigator—or an overdrive, for that matter." He looked about speculatively. "There was a Standing Wave transceiver in this section, I think, but it'd be a miracle if it still functioned."

"Would you know how to test it?" Robin asked.

"No. Anyhow we've got more immediate business than that. We've picked up a native. What's more, he speaks English—must have picked it up from the *Dragon*. We started to ask him questions, but it turns out he's some sort of top official, so we brought him over here on the off chance that one of you was alive."

"What a break!" Robin One said explosively.

"A whole series of them," 12-Upjohn agreed, none too happily. He had long ago learned to be at his most suspicious when the breaks seemed to be coming his way. "Well, better bring him in."

"Can't," Oberholzer said. "Apologies, Your Excellency, but he wouldn't fit. You'll have to come to him."

III

It was impossible to imagine what sort of stock the Callean had evolved from. He seemed to be a thorough-going mixture of several

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different phyla. Most of him was a brown, segmented tube about the diameter of a barrel and perhaps twenty-five feet long, rather like a cross between a python and a worm. The front segments were carried upright, raising the head a good ten feet off the ground.

Properly speaking, 12-Upjohn thought, the Callean really had no head, but only a front end, marked by two enormous faceted eyes and three upsetting simple eyes which were usually closed. Beneath these there was a collar of six short, squid-like tentacles, carried wrapped around the creature in a ropy ring. He was as impossible-looking as he was fearsome, and 12-Upjohn felt at a multiple disadvantage from the beginning.

"How did you learn our language?" he said.

"I learned it from you," the Callean said promptly. The voice was unexpectedly high, a quality which was accentuated by the creature's singsong intonation. 12-Upjohn could not see where it was coming from. "From your ship which I took apart, the dragon-of-war."

"Why did you do that?"

"It was evident that you meant me ill," the Callean sang. "At that time I did not know that you were sick, but that became evident at the dissections."

"Dissections! You dissected the crew of the *Dragon*?"

"All but one."

There was a growl from Oberholzer. The Consort of State shot him a warning glance.

"You may have made a mistake," 12-Upjohn said. "A natural mistake, perhaps. But it was our purpose to offer you trade and peaceful relationships. Our weapons were only precautionary."

"I do not think so," the Callean said, "and I never make mistakes. That you make mistakes is natural, but it is not natural to me."

12-Upjohn felt his jaw dropping. That the creature meant what he said could not be doubted; his command of the language was too complete to permit any more sensible interpretation. 12-Upjohn found himself at a loss; not only was the statement the most staggering he had ever heard from any sane, sentient being, but while it was being made he had discovered how the Callean spoke: the sounds issued at low volume from a multitude of spiracles or breath-holes all along the body, each hole producing only one pure tone, the words and intonations being formed in mid-air by intermodulation—a miracle of coordination among a multitude of organs obviously unsuitable for sound-forming at all. This thing was formidable—that would have been evident even without the lesson of the chunk of the *Novoe Washingtongrad* canted crazily in the sands behind them.

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Sands? He looked about with a start. Until that moment the Callean had so hypnotized his attention that he had forgotten to look at the landscape, but his unconscious had registered it. Sand, and nothing but sand. If there were better parts of Callë than this desert, they were not visible from here, all the way to the horizon.

"What do you propose to do with us?" he said at last. There was really nothing else to say; cut off in every possible sense from his home world, he no longer had any base from which to negotiate.

"Nothing," the Callean said. "You are free to come and go as you please."

"You're no longer afraid of us?"

"No. When you came to kill me I prevented you, but you can no longer do that."

"There you've made a mistake, all right," Oberholzer said lifting his rifle toward the multi-colored, glittering jewels of the Callean's eyes. "You know what this is—they must have had them on the *Dragon.*"

"Don't be an idiot, Sergeant," 12-Upjohn said sharply. "We're in no position to make any threats." Nor, he added silently, should the Marine have called attention to his gun before the Callean had taken any overt notice of it.

"I know what it is," the creature said. "You cannot kill me with that. You tried it often before and found you could not. You would remember this if you were not sick."

"I never saw anything that I couldn't kill with a Sussmann flamer," Oberholzer said between his teeth. "Let me try it on the bastard, Your Excellency."

"Wait a minute," Robin One said, to 12-Upjohn's astonishment. "I want to ask some questions—if you don't mind, Your Excellency?"

"I don't mind," 12-Upjohn said after an instant. Anything to get the Marine's crazy impulse toward slaughter side-tracked. "Go ahead."

"Did you dissect the crew of the *Dragon* personally?" Robin asked the Callean.

"Of course."

"Are you the ruler of this planet?"

"Yes."

"Are you the only person in this system?"

"No."

Robin paused and frowned. Then he said: "Are you the only person of your species in your system?"

"No. There is another on Xixobrax—the fourth planet."

Robin paused once more, but not, it seemed to 12-Upjohn, as though he were in any doubt; it was only as though he were gathering his courage for the key question of all. 12-Upjohn tried to imagine what it might be, and failed.

"How many of you are there?" Robin One said.

"I cannot answer that. As of the

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instant you asked me that question, there were eighty-three hundred thousand billion, one hundred and eighty nine million, four hundred and sixty five thousand, one hundred and eighty; but now the number has changed, and it goes on changing."

"Impossible," 12-Upjohn said, stunned. "Not even two planets could support such a number—and you'd never allow a desert like this to go on existing if you had even a fraction of that population to support. I begin to think, sir, that you are a type normal to my business: the ordinary, unimaginative liar."

"He's not lying," Robin said, his voice quivering. "It all fits together. Just let me finish, sir, please. I'll explain, but I've got to go through to the end first."

"Well," 12-Upjohn said, helplessly, "all right, go ahead." But he was instantly sorry, for what Robin One said was:

"Thank you. I have no more questions."

The Callean turned in a great liquid wheel and poured away across the sand dunes at an incredible speed. 12-Upjohn shouted after him, without any clear idea of what it was that he was shouting—but no matter, for the Callean took no notice. Within seconds, it seemed, he was only a threadworm in the middle distance, and then he was gone. They were all alone in the chill desert air.

Oberholzer lowered his rifle bewilderedly. "He's fast," he said to nobody in particular. "Cripes, but he's fast."

"That proves it," Robin said tightly. He was trembling, but whether with fright or elation, 12-Upjohn could not tell; possibly both.

"It had better prove something," the Consort of State said, trying hard not to sound portentous. There was something about this bright remote desert that made empty any possible pretense to dignity. "As far as I can see, you've just lost us what may have been our only chance to treat with these creatures . . . just as surely as the sergeant would have done it with his gun. Explain, please."

"I didn't really catch on until I realized that he was using the second person singular when he spoke to us," Robin said. If he had heard any threat implied in 12-Upjohn's charge, it was not visible; he seemed totally pre-occupied. "There's no way to tell them apart in modern English. We thought he was referring to us as 'you' plural, but he wasn't, any more than his 'I' was a plural. He thinks we're all a part of the same personality—including the men from the *Dragon*, too—*just as he is himself*. That's why he left when I said I had no more questions. He can't comprehend that each of us has an independent ego. For him such a thing doesn't exist."

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"Like ants?" 12-Upjohn said slowly. "I don't see how an advanced technology . . . but no, I do see. And if it's so, it means that any Callean we run across could be their chief of state, but that no one of them actually is. The only other real individual is next door, on the fourth planet—another hive ego."

"Maybe not," Robin said. "Don't forget that he thinks we're part of one, too."

12-Upjohn dismissed that possibility at once. "He's sure to know his own system, after all. . . . What alarms me is the population figure he cited. It's got to be *at least* cluster-wide—and from the exactness with which he was willing to quote it, for a given instant, he had to have immediate access to it. An instant, effortless census."

"Yes," Robin said. "Meaning mind-to-mind contact, from one to all, throughout the whole complex. That's what started me thinking about the funny way he used pronouns."

"If that's the case, Robin, we are *spurlos versenkt*. And my pronoun includes the Earth."

"They may have some limitations," Robin said, though it was clear that he was only whistling in the dark. "But at least it explains why they butchered the *Dragon*'s crew so readily—and why they're willing to let us wander around their planet as if we didn't even exist. We don't, for them. They can't have any respect for a single life. No wonder they didn't give a damn for the sergeant's gun!"

His initial flush had given way to a marble paleness; there were beads of sweat on his brow in the dry hot air, and he was trembling harder than ever. He looked as though he might faint in the next instant, though only the slightest of stutters disturbed his rush of words. But for once the Consort of State could not accuse him of agitation over trifles.

Oberholzer looked from one to the other, his expression betraying perhaps only disgust, or perhaps blank incomprehension—it was impossible to tell. Then, with a sudden sharp *snick* which made them both start, he shot closed the safety catch on the Sussmann.

"Well," he said in a smooth cold empty voice, "now we know what we'll eat."

IV

Their basic and dangerous division of plans and purposes began with that.

Sgt. Oberholzer was not a fool, as the hash marks on his sleeve and the battle stars on his ribbons attested plainly; he understood the implications of what the Callean had said—at least after the Momma's boy had interpreted them—and he was shrewd enough not to undervalue the contribution the poor terrified poet had made

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to their possible survival on this world. For the moment, however, it suited the Marine to play the role of the dumb sergeant to the hilt. If a full understanding of what the Calleans were like might reduce him to a like state of trembling impotence, he could do without it.

Not that he really believed that any such thing could happen to him; but it was not hard to see that Momma's boys were halfway there already, and if the party as a whole hoped to get anything done, they had to be jolted out of it as fast as possible.

At first he thought he had made it. "Certainly not!" the Consort of State said indignantly. "You're a man, Sergeant, not a Callean. Nothing the Calleans do is any excuse for your behaving otherwise than as a man."

"I'd rather eat an enemy than a friend," Oberholzer said cryptically. "Have you got any supplies inside there?"

"I—I don't know. But that has nothing to do with it."

"Depends on what you mean by 'it.' But maybe we can argue about that later. What are your orders, Your Excellency?"

"I haven't an order in my head," 12-Upjohn said with sudden, disarming frankness. "We'd better try to make some sensible plans first, and stop bickering. Robin, stop snuffling, too. The question is, what can we do besides trying to survive, and cherishing an idiot hope for a rescue mission?"

"For one thing, we can try to spring the man from the *Dragon*'s crew that these worms have still got alive," Oberholzer said. "If that's what he meant when he said they dissected all but one."

"That doesn't seem very feasible to me," 12-Upjohn said. "We have no idea where they're holding him—"

"Ask them. This one answered every question you asked him."

"— and even supposing that he's nearby, we couldn't free him from a horde of Calleans, no matter how many dead bodies they let you pile up. At best, sooner or later you'd run out of ammunition."

"It's worth trying," Oberholzer said. "We could use the manpower."

"What for?" Robin One demanded. "He'd be just one more mouth to feed. At the moment, at least, they're feeding him."

"For raising ship," Oberholzer retorted. "*If* there's any damn chance of welding our two heaps of junk together and getting off this mudball. We ought to look into it, anyhow."

Robin One was looking more alarmed by the minute. If the prospect of getting into a fight with the Calleans had scared him, Oberholzer thought, the notion of hard physical labor evidently was producing something like panic.

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"Where could we go?" he said. "Supposing that we could fly such a shambles at all?"

"I don't know," Oberholzer said. "We don't know what's possible yet. But anything's better than sitting around here and starving. First off, I want that man from the *Dragon*."

"I'm opposed to it," 12-Upjohn said firmly. "The Calleans are leaving us to our own devices now. If we cause any real trouble they may well decide that we'd be safer locked up, or dead. I don't mind planning to lift ship if we can—but no military expeditions."

"Sir," Oberholzer said, "military action on this planet is what I was sent here for. I reserve the right to use my own judgment. You can complain, if we ever get back—but I'm not going to let a man rot in a worm-burrow while I've got a gun on my back. You can come along or not, but we're going."

He signalled to Cassirir, who seemed to be grinning slightly. 12-Upjohn stared at him for a moment, and then shook his head.

"We'll stay," he said. "Since we have no water, Sergeant, I hope you'll do us the kindness of telling us where your part of the ship lies."

"That way, about two kilometers," Oberholzer said. "Help yourself. If you want to settle in there, you'll save us the trouble of toting Private Hannes with us on a stretcher."

"Of course," the Consort of State said. "We'll take care of him. But, Sergeant—"

"Yes, Your Excellency?"

"If this stunt of yours still leaves us all alive afterwards, and we do get back to any base of ours, I will *certainly* see to it that a complaint is lodged. I'm not disowning you now because it's obvious that we'll all have to work together to survive, and a certain amount of amity will be essential. But don't be deceived by that."

"I understand, Sir," Oberholzer said levelly. "Cassirir, let's go. We'll backtrack to where we nabbed the worm, and then follow his trail to wherever he came from. Fall in."

The men shouldered their Sussmanns. 12-Upjohn and Robin One watched them go. At the last dune before the two would go out of sight altogether, Oberholzer turned and waved, but neither waved back. Shrugging, Oberholzer resumed plodding.

"Sarge?"

"Yeah?"

"How *do* you figure to spring this joker with only four guns?"

"Five guns if we spring him—I've got a side-arm," Oberholzer reminded him. "We'll play it by ear, that's all. I want to see just how serious these worms are about leaving us alone, and letting us shoot them if we feel like it. I've got a hunch that they aren't very bright, one at a time, and don't

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react fast to strictly local situations. If this whole planet's population is like one huge body, and the worms are its brain-cells, then we're germs—and maybe it'd take more than four germs to make the body do anything against us that counted, at least fast enough to do any good."

Cassirir was frowning absurdly; he did not seem to be taking the theory in without pain. Well, Cassirir had never been much of a man for tactics.

"Here's where we found the guy," one of the men said, pointing at the sand.

"That's not much of a trail," Cassirir said. "If there's any wind it'll be wiped out like a shot."

"Take a sight on it—that's all we need. You saw him run off—straight as a ruled line, no twists or turns around the dunes or anything. Like an army ant. If the trail sands over, we'll follow the sight. It's a cinch it leads some place."

"All right," Cassirir said, getting out his compass. After a while the four of them resumed trudging.

There were only a few drops of hot, flat-tasting water left in the canteens, and their eyes were gritty and red from dryness and sand, when they topped the ridge that overlooked the nest. The word sprang instantly into Oberholzer's mind, though perhaps he had been expecting some such thing ever since Robin One had compared the Calleans to ants.

It was a collection of rough white spires, each perhaps fifty feet high, rising from a common dough-like mass which almost filled a small valley. There was no greenery around it and no visible source of water, but there were three roads, two of them leading into oval black entrances which Oberholzer could see from here. Ocasionally—not often—a Callean would scuttle out and vanish, or come speeding over the horizon and dart into the darkness. Some of the spires bore masts carrying what seemed to be antennae or more recondite electronic devices, but there were no windows to be seen; and the only sound in the valley, except for the dry dusty wind, was a subdued, composite hum.

"Man!" Cassirir said, whispering without being aware of it. "It must be as black as the ace of spades in there. Anybody got a torch?"

Nobody had. "We won't need one anyhow," Oberholzer said confidently. "They've got eyes, and they can see in desert sunlight. That means they can't move around in total darkness. Let's go—I'm thirsty."

They stumbled down into the valley and approached the nearest black hole cautiously. Sure enough, it was not as black as it had appeared from the hill; there

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was a glow inside, which had been hidden from them against the contrast of the glaringly lit sands. Nevertheless, Oberholzer found himself hanging back.

While he hesitated, a Callean came rocketing out of the entrance and pulled to a smooth, sudden stop.

"You are not to get in the way," he said, in exactly the same piping singsong voice the other had used.

"Tell me where to go and I'll stay out of your way," Oberholzer said. "Where is the man from the warship that you didn't dissect?"

"In Gnitonis, halfway around the world from here."

Oberholzer felt his shoulders sag, but the Callean was not through. "You should have told me that you wanted him," he said. "I will have him brought to you. Is there else that you need?"

"Water," Oberholzer said hopefully.

"That will be brought. There is no water you can use here. Stay out of the cities; you will be in the way."

"How else can we eat?"

"Food will be brought. You should make your needs known; you are of low intelligence and helpless. I forbid nothing. I know you are harmless, and your life is short in any case; but I do not want you to get in the way."

The repetition was beginning to tell on Oberholzer, and the frustration created by his having tried to use a battering-ram against a freely swinging door was compounded by his mental picture of what the two Momma's boys would say when the squad got back. "Thank you," he said, and bringing the Sussmann into line, he trained it on the Callean's squid-like head and squeezed the trigger.

It was at once established that the Calleans were as mortal to Sussmann flamers as is all other flesh and blood; this one made a very satisfactory corpse. Unsatisfied, the flamer bolt when onto burn a long slash in the wall of the nest, not far above the entrance. Oberholzer grounded the rifle and waited to see what would happen next; his men hefted their weapons tensely.

For a few minutes there was no motion but the random twitching of the headless Callean's legs. Evidently he was still not entirely dead, though he was a good four feet shorter than he had been before, and plainly was feeling the lack.

Then, there was a stir inside the dark entrance.

A ten-legged animal about the size of a large rabbit emerged tentatively into the sunlight, followed by two more, and then by a whole series of them, perhaps as many as twenty. Though Oberholzer had been unabashed by the Calleans themselves, there was

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something about these things that made him feel sick. They were coal black and shiny, and they did not seem to have any eyes; their heavily armored heads bore nothing but a set of rudimentary palps and a pair of enormous pincers, like those of a June-beetle.

Sightless or no, they were excellent surgeons. They cut the remains of the Callean swiftly into sections, precisely one metamere to a section, and bore the carrion back inside the nest. Filled with loathing, Oberholzer stepped quickly forward and kicked one of the last in the procession. It toppled over like an unstable kitchen stool, but regained its footing as though nothing had happened. The kick had not hurt it visibly, though Oberholzer's toes felt as though he had kicked a Victorian iron dog. The creature, still holding its steak delicately in its living tongs, mushed implacably after the others back into the dubiety of the nest. Then all that was left in the broiling sunlight was a few pools of blackening blood seeping swiftly into the sand.

"Let's get out of here," Cassirir said raggedly.

"Stand fast," the sergeant growled. "If they're mad at us, I want to know about it right now."

But the next Callean to pass them, some twenty eternal minutes later, hardly even slowed down. "Keep out of the way," he said and streaked away over the dunes. Snarling, Oberholzer caromed a bolt after him, but missed him clean.

"All right," he said. "Let's go back. No hitting the canteens till we're five kilometers past the mid-point cairn. March!"

The men were all on the verge of prostration by the time that point was passed, but Oberholzer never once had to enforce the order. Nobody, it appeared, was eager to come to an end on Callë as a series of butcher's cuts in the tongs of a squad of huge black beetles.

V

"I know what they think," the man from the *Dragon* said. "I've heard them say it often enough."

He was a personable youngster, perhaps thirty, with blond wavy hair which had been turned almost white by the strong Callean sunlight: his captors had walked him for three hours every day on the desert. He had once been the *Dragon's* radioman, a post which in interstellar flight is a branch of astronomy, not of communications; nevertheless, Oberholzer and the Marines called him Sparks, in deference to a tradition which, 12-Upjohn suspected, the Marines did not even know existed.

"Then why wouldn't there be a chance of our establishing better relations with the 'person' on the

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fourth planet?" 12-Upjohn said. "After all, there's never been an Earth landing there."

"Because the 'person' on Xixobrax is a colony of Callë, and knows everything that goes on here. It took the two planets in cooperation to destroy the fleet. There's almost full telepathic communion between the two—in fact, all through the Central Empire. The only rapport that seems to weaken over short distances—interplanetary distances—is the sense of identity. That's why each planet has an 'I' of its own, its own ego. But it's not the kind of ego we know anything about. Xixobrax wouldn't give us any better deal than Callë has, any more than I'd give Callë a better deal than you would, Your Excellency. They have common purposes and allegiances. All the Central Empire seems to be like that."

12-Upjohn thought about it; but he did not like what he thought. It was a knotty problem, even in theory.

Telepathy among men had never amounted to anything. After the pioneer exploration of the microcosm with the Arpe Effect—the second of two unsuccessful attempts at an interstellar drive, long before the discovery of the Standing Wave—it had become easy to see why this would be so. Psi forces in general were characteristic only of the subspace in which the primary particles of the atom had their being; their occasional manifestations in the macrocosm were statistical accidents, as weak and indirigible as spontaneous radioactive decay.

Up to now this had suited 12-Upjohn. It had always seemed to him that the whole notion of telepathy was a dodge—an attempt to bypass the plain duty of each man to learn to know his brother, and, if possible, to learn to love him; the telepathy fanatics were out to short-circuit the task, to make easy the most difficult assignment a human being might undertake. He was well aware, too, of the bias against telepathy which was inherent in his profession of diplomat; yet he had always been certain of his case, hazy though it was around the edges. One of his proofs was that telepathy's main defenders invariably were incorrigibly lazy writers, from Upton Sinclair and Theodore Dreiser all the way down to—

All the same, it seemed unarguable that the whole center of the galaxy, an enormously diverse collection of peoples and cultures, was being held together in a common and strife-free union by telepathy alone, or perhaps by telepathy and its even more dubious adjuncts: a whole galaxy held together by a force so unreliable that two human beings sitting across from each other at a card-table had never been able to put it to practicable use.

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Somewhere, there was a huge hole in the argument.

While he sat helplessly thinking in these circles, even Robin One was busy, toting power packs to the welding crew which was working outside to braze together on the desert the implausible, misshapen lump of metal which the Marine sergeant was fanatically determined would become a ship again. Now the job was done, though no shipwright would admire it, and the question of where to go with it was being debated in full council. Sparks, for his part, was prepared to bet that the Calleans would not hinder their departure.

"Why would they have given us all this oxygen and stuff if they were going to prevent us from using it?" he said reasonably. "They know what it's for—even if they have no brains, collectively they're plenty smart enough."

"*No* brains?" 12-Upjohn said. "Or are you just exaggerating?"

"No brains," the man from the *Dragon* insisted. "Just lots of ganglia. I gather that's the way all of the races of the Central Empire are organized, regardless of other physical differences. That's what they mean when they say we're all sick—hadn't you realized that?"

"No," 12-Upjohn said in slowly dawning horror. "You had better spell it out."

"Why, they say that's why we get cancer. They say that the brain is the ultimate source of all tumors, and is itself a tumor. They call it 'hostile symbiosis.'"

"Malignant?"

"In the long run. Races that develop them kill themselves off. Something to do with solar radiation; animals on planets of Population II stars develop them, Population I planets don't."

Robin One hummed an archaic twelve-tone series under his breath. There were no words to go with it, but the Consort of State recognized it; it was part of a chorale from a 20th Century American opera, and the words went: *Weep, weep beyond time for this Earth of hours.*

"It fits," he said heavily. "So to receive and use a weak field like telepathy, you need a weak brain."

"Earthworms of the galaxy, unite," Robin One said.

"They already have," Sgt. Oberholzer pointed out. "So where does all this leave us?"

"It means," 12-Upjohn said slowly, "That this Central Empire, where the stars are almost all Population I, is spreading out toward the spiral arms where the Earth lies. Any cluster civilizations they meet are natural allies —clusters are purely Population I —and probably have already been mentally assimilated. Any possible natural allies *we* meet, going around Population II stars, we may well pick a fight with instead."

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"That's not what I meant," Sgt. Oberholzer said.

"I know what you meant; but this changes things. As I understand it, we have a chance of making a straight hop to the nearest Earth base, if we go on starvation rations—"

"—and if I don't make more than a point zero five per cent error in plotting the course," Sparks put in.

"Yes. On the other hand, we can make *sure* of getting there by going in short leaps via planets known to be inhabited, but never colonized and possibly hostile. The only other possibility is Xixobrax, which I think we've ruled out. Correct?"

"Right as rain," Sgt. Oberholzer said. "Now I see what you're driving at, Your Excellency. The only thing is—you didn't mention that the stepping-stone method will take us the rest of our lives."

"So I didn't," 12-Upjohn said bleakly. "But I hadn't forgotten it. The other side of *that* coin is that it will be even longer than that before the Matriarchy and the Central Empire collide."

"After which," Sgt. Oberholzer said with a certain relish, "I doubt that it'll be a Matriarchy, whichever wins. Are you calling for a vote, Sir?"

"Well—yes, I seem to be."

"Then let's grasshopper," Sgt. Oberholzer said unhesitatingly. "The boys and I can't fight a point zero five per cent error in navigation—but for hostile planets, we've got the flamers."

Robin One shuddered. "I don't mind the fighting part," he said unexpectedly. "But I *do* simply loathe the thought of being an old, old man when I get home. All the same, we do have to get the word back."

"I agree," Sparks said.

"Very good," 12-Upjohn said. He was uncertain of his exact emotion at this moment; perhaps gloomy satisfaction was as close a description as any. "I make it unanimous. Let's get ready."

The sergeant saluted and prepared to leave the cabin; but suddenly he turned back.

"I didn't think very much of either of you, a while back," he said brutally. "But I'll tell you this: there must be something about brains that involves guts, too. I'll back 'em any time against any critter that lets itself be shot like a fish in a barrel—whatever the odds."

The Consort of State was still mulling that speech over as the madman's caricature of an interstellar ship groaned and lifted its lumps and angles from Callë. Who knows, he kept telling himself, who knows, it might be true.

But he noticed that Robin One was still humming the chorale from *Psyche and Eros;* and ahead the galactic night was as black as death.

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This month, Isaac Asimov ventures into the realm of the might-have-been, and speculates on what our heavens would be like if our Sun had a companion—and the changes in human history such a companion would have effected.

THE PLANET OF THE DOUBLE SUN

by Isaac Asimov

THE TITLE SOUNDS AS THOUGH THIS were going to be a rather old-fashioned science-fiction story, doesn't it?

Yet although the title may sound old-fashioned, the situation need not be. One of the most glamorous settings possible in science-fiction is that of the planet with multiple suns. I've used such a setting myself in *Sucker Bait* (1954) which dealt with a planet with two suns, and, of course, in *Nightfall* (1941) which was set on a planet with six suns.

Generally, the author (and I include myself very emphatically) doesn't worry about the astronomic verities of the situation. The suns usually look like suns and both (or all) seem to move independently in the sky. That is, the author will carefully throw in local color by saying that one sun was just rising, while the other had just passed zenith. He may make matters more colorful (figuratively and literally) by having one sun, for example, red and the other blue. Then he can talk of double shadows and their various configurations and color combinations.

A little of this is enough to make us sigh at our misfortune in having only one sun in the sky, and a pretty colorless one at that. Oh, the missing glories!

What *would* it be like to have more than one sun in the sky? There are, of course, a wide variety of types of multiple stars; some are made up of two components and some of more than two. In some multiple stars, the components are near together; in others far apart. The components may be similar or not similar; one may be

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a red giant, one may be a white dwarf.

But let's not make up any systems or look for something exotic or foreign. The fact of the matter is that we have an example in our back yard. The nearest star to us in space, a star so close we can almost reach out and touch it, a next-door neighbor no more than 25,000,000,000,000 miles away, good old Alpha Centauri, is a multiple star.

Suppose we were on a planet in the Alpha Centauri system. What would it be like?

To begin with, what is Alpha Centauri like? To a science fiction reader, Alpha Centauri is one of the most familiar stars, but for one reason only—it is our neighbor. More pioneer interstellar expeditions in science-fiction have set out for Alpha Centauri than for any other star (naturally). But except that Alpha Centauri is a goal and a destination, what else is said about it in s. f. stories?

Practically nothing.

So let's take a look at our neighbor.

In the first place, Alpha Centauri is a star in the Southern Celestial Hemisphere. It is never visible in the sky north of about 30 degrees North Latitude. The chances are you've never seen it; I know I never have. Moreover, the ancient Greeks never saw it.

The chief observatories of the medieval Arabs, in Cordova, Bagdad and Damascus, were all north of the 30 degree line. Presumably ordinary Arabs in the Arabian and Saharan deserts must occasionally have seen a bright star very near the southern horizon, but this, apparently, did not penetrate to the egg-head level.

The test of the matter is that Alpha Centauri, although the third brightest star in the sky, has no name of its own, neither Greek nor Arabic. (The name "Alpha Centauri" is official "astronomese.")

Of course, once Europeans started adventuring down the coast of Africa in the late 1400's, the bright star must have been observed at once. Eventually, astronomers got around to making star maps of those parts of the Southern Celestial Hemisphere invisible from Europe. (The first was Edmund Halley, of Halley's Comet fame, who, in 1676, at the age of 20, travelled to St. Helena to map southern stars.) Astronomers divided the southern heavens into constellations to complete the scheme already begun in those parts of the heavens which the ancients had been able to observe.

They named the constellations in Latin, naturally, and included mythological creatures as a further match to what already existed in the sky (just as planets discovered in modern times received mythological names matching the older ones.) One of the prominent

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southern constellations was named "the Centaur." In Latin, this is "Centaurus" and the genitive ("of the Centaur") is "Centauri."

Centaurus contains two first magnitude stars. The brighter was named "Alpha Centauri" and the other "Beta Centauri." The words, "alpha" and "beta" are not only the first two letters of the Greek alphabet, but were also used by the Greeks to represent the numbers "one" and "two," a habit never broken by scientists. The names of the stars, freely translated, therefore mean "star number one of the Centaur" and "star number two of the Centaur," respectively.

The magnitude of Alpha Centauri is 0.06 which makes it, as stated, the third brightest star of the sky. The only stars brighter are Canopus (−0.86) and, of course, Sirius (−1.58).

(The lower the magnitude, the brighter the star, in a logarithmic ratio. A difference in magnitude of one unit means a difference in brightness of 2.512 times. A difference in magnitude of two units means a difference in brightness of 2.512 x 2.512 or about 6.31 times and so on.)

About 1650, telescopes became good enough to detect the fact that some stars, which looked like single points of light to the naked eye, were actually two closely spaced points of light. In 1685, Jesuit missionaries in Africa, taking time out for astronomical observations, first noticed that Alpha Centauri is an example of such a "double star." The brighter component is Alpha Centauri A, the other Alpha Centauri B.

The magnitude of Alpha Centauri A by itself is 0.3 and that of Alpha Centauri B is 1.7. The 1.4 difference in magnitude means that Alpha Centauri A is 3.6 times as bright as Alpha Centauri B. To translate the brightness into absolute terms—that is, to compare either component with our Sun—it is necessary to know the distance of Alpha Centauri from Earth.

This distance could be measured by noting slight shifts in the star's position, mirroring the change in Earth's position as it revolved about the Sun. This tiny yearly motion of a star, resulting from Earth's motion, is called "stellar parallax" and grows smaller as the distance of a star increases. A very distant star has virtually no parallax at all, so it can be treated as a motionless reference point against which the parallax of a nearby star could be measured. (Without some reference point, parallax is meaningless.)

However, astronomers had for centuries been trying to detect stellar parallaxes without success, although they had succeeded first with the parallax of the Moon, then of the Sun and the planets. Apparently, even the nearest stars

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had parallaxes so small as to make them difficult to measure.

Another trouble was that without knowing the parallaxes, one couldn't tell which star was near and which far. How, then, know which star to measure and which to use as a motionless reference point?

Astronomers made the general assumption that, all things being equal, a bright star is closer to Earth than is a dim star. Also, a star with high proper motion (a shift in position due to the star's own motion through space—a shift which is continuous, always in one direction and not cyclic, or back and forth, as parallactic shifts would be) was assumed nearer the Earth than one with a low proper motion. These assumptions would not necessarily hold true in every case, for a bright star might be more distant than a faint one, but be enough brighter, intrinsically, to make up for that. Again, a near star might have a very rapid apparent motion, but one which was in our line of sight so that it wouldn't show up. Nevertheless, these assumptions at least gave astronomers a lead.

By the 1830's the time was ripe for a concerted attack on the problem. Three astronomers of three different nations tackled three different stars. Thomas Henderson (British) observed Alpha Centauri, and Friedrich Wilhelm Struve (German-born Russian) worked on Vega, the fourth brightest star in the sky. Both stars were not only bright but had pretty snappy proper motions. Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel (German) applied his efforts to 61 Cygni. This was a dim star but it had an unusually high proper motion. In each case, the star's position over at least a year was compared with that of a dim and presumably very far off neighbor star.

Sure enough, each of the three stars being investigated shifted position slightly compared to its presumably distant neighbor. And so it happened (as it often does in science) that after centuries of failure, there were several almost simultaneous successes.

Bessel got in first, in 1839, and he gets the credit of being the first to measure the distance of a star. It turned out that 61 Cygni is 11 light years distant. Henderson, later in 1839, reported Alpha Centauri to be a little over 4 light years distant, and Struve, in 1840, placed Vega at about 27 light years distant.

No star has been found closer than those of the Alpha Centauri system.

Knowing the distance of Alpha Centauri, it is easy to calculate that Alpha Centauri A (the brighter of the pair) is almost exactly as bright as our Sun. Since its spectrum showed it to have the same surface temperature, it is our

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Sun's twin—same diameter, same mass, same brightness . . . apparently the same everything.

As for Alpha Centauri B, if it were the same temperature as Alpha Centauri A, then it would be just as luminous per unit area. To be only 1/3.6 as luminous as its companion, it must have 1/3.6 its area. The diameters of the two stars would be as the square roots of the respective areas and (assuming the two stars to be equally dense) the masses would be as the cube of the square roots of the respective areas.

It would then turn out that Alpha Centauri A would have a diameter 1.9 times that of Alpha Centauri B and a mass about 7 times that of Alpha Centauri B. (Actually, Alpha Centauri B is a trifle cooler than Alpha Centauri A so that the comparison is not exactly as I've given it, but for the purposes of this article, we needn't worry about the refinements.)

The two stars rotate in elliptical orbits about a common center of gravity. The period of rotation is about 80 years. When the stars are closest, they are about a billion miles apart. When they are furthest, they are 3.3 billion miles apart.

Now, then, suppose we try to duplicate (in imagination) the Alpha Centauri system here in our own Solar system. Since Alpha Centauri A is the twin of our Sun in every respect, let's suppose our Sun is Alpha Centauri A, but let's keep on referring to it, for convenience's sake, as the Sun.

Let's imagine Alpha Centauri B (which we will call simply Sun B) in orbit about the Sun. We can avoid unnecessary complications by making it exactly one-half the diameter of the Sun and equally dense so that it is one-eighth the Sun's mass. This may not be exactly the situation with respect to Alpha Centauri B, but it is a reasonably close approximation.

Furthermore, let's suppose Sun B is travelling in a nearly circular orbit, in the same plane as the planets generally, and at the average distance of Alpha Centauri B from Alpha Centauri A (again a change in detail but not in essence.) This would place it in orbit about 2,000,000,000 miles from the Sun. This is almost as though we have taken the planet Uranus of our Solar system and replaced it with Alpha Centauri B.

All this would make Earth part of a multiple star system very closely resembling that of Alpha Centauri. Now what would the heavens be like?

In some ways, our Solar system would be changed. Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, as we know them, would be out. Their orbits would be tangled with Sun B. However, these planets were unknown in the pre-telescopic era, so we can do without them as far as naked-

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eye observation is concerned.

But even Saturn, the outermost of the planets known to the ancients, would be nearer to the Sun than to Sun. B in the position I placed the latter. With the Sun, on top of that, having a gravitational field eight times as intense as that of Sun B, it should hang on to Saturn and the still closer planets with no trouble. (There might be interesting minor effects on the planetary orbits but I'm not astronomer enough, alas, to be able to calculate them.)

Sun B would behave like a new and very large "planet" of the Sun. The Sun and Sun B would revolve about a center of gravity which would be located in the asteroid belt. The motion of the Sun about this point once every eighty years would, however, not be detectable in pre-telescopic days, because the Sun would carry all the planets, including Earth, with it. Neither the Sun's distance nor Sun B's distance from Earth would be affected by that motion.

(After the invention of the telescope, the Sun's swing—with us in tow—could become noticeable through its reflection in the parallactic displacement of the nearer stars.)

But what would Sun B look like?

Well, it would *not* look like a Sun. It would be a point of light like the other planets. A diameter of 430,000 miles at a distance of 2,000,000,000 miles would subtend an angle of about 45 seconds of arc. Sun B would appear to the naked eye to be just about the apparent size of the smaller, but closer, Jupiter.

To a naked-eye observer (such as the Greeks or Babylonians) Sun B would be one more point of light moving slowly against the stars. It would be moving more slowly than the others, making a complete circuit of the sky in about 80 years, as compared with 29½ years for Saturn and 12 for Jupiter. From this, the Greeks would—rightly—conclude that Sun B was further from Earth than was any other planet.

Of course, one thing would make Sun B very unusual and quite different from the other planets. It would be very bright. It would have an apparent magnitude of about —18. It would be only 1/3000 as bright as the Sun, to be sure, but it would still be 150 times as bright as the full Moon. With Sun B in the night sky, Earth would be well-illuminated.

Another thing might be unusual about Sun B; not as a matter of inevitability, as with its brilliance, but as a matter of reasonable probability, at least.

As a "planet" of the Solar system, why should it not have satellites, as the other planets have. (Of course, its satellites would be revolving about a Sun and would really be planets.)

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To be sure, since Sun B is much larger than the other planets, it could be expected to have a satellite much larger and more distant from itself than is true for any other planet.

It might, for instance, have a satellite the size of Uranus. (Why not? Uranus would be much smaller compared to Sun B than Jupiter is compared to the Sun. If the Sun can have Jupiter in tow, then it is perfectly reasonable to allow Sun B to have a planet the size of Uranus.)

Uranus could be circling Sun B at a distance of 100,000,000 miles. (Again, why not? Jupiter, which is considerably smaller than Sun B and considerably closer to the competing gravity of the Sun, nevertheless manages to hold on to satellites at a distance of 15,000,000 miles from itself. If Jupiter can manage that, Sun B can manage 100,000,000.)

If Uranus moved about Sun B in the plane of Earth's orbit, it would move first to one side of Sun B, then back and to the other side, then back and to the first side, and so on, indefinitely. Its maximum separation from Sun B would be about 3 degrees of arc. This is about 6 times the apparent diameter of the Sun or the Moon and such a separation could be easily seen with the naked eye.

But would Uranus itself be visible at that distance from us?

Well, right at the moment, *without* Sun B, Uranus *is* visible. It is 1,800,000,000 miles from the Sun (nearly as far as I have, in imagination, put Sun B) and it has a magnitude of 5.7 which makes it just visible as a very faint star.

But if Uranus were rotating about Sun B, it would be lit up not merely by the dim light of the distant Sun (the reflection of which is all we see Uranus by, actually) but also by the stronger rays of the much nearer Sun B.

The average magnitude of Uranus under these conditions would be 1.7. It wouldn't be as bright as the other planets, but it would be brighter than the North Star, for instance. The glare of the nearby Sun B might make Uranus harder to observe than the North Star, but it should still be clearly visible. (Sun B might have more than one satellite, too, but let's not complicate the picture. One satellite will do.)

The Greeks would thus be treated to the spectacle not only of an unusually and exceptionally brilliant point of light but also to another point of light (much dimmer) that oscillated back and forth as though caught in the grip of the brighter point.

Both factors, brilliance and a visible satellite, would be completely unique. I have a theory that this would have made an interesting difference in Greek

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thinking, both on the mythological and the scientific level.

Mythology first, since Greek mythology is older than Greek science; and that involves the "synodic period" of a planet. This is the interval between successive meetings of a planet and the Sun. Jupiter and the Sun meet every 399 days; Saturn and the Sun every 378 days. Sun B and the Sun would meet in Earth's sky every 369 days. (This is just a measure of how frequently Earth in its revolution manges to get on the other side of the Sun from the planet in question.)

As the planet approaches the Sun it spends less and less time in the night sky and more and more time in the day sky. For ordinary planets this means it becomes less and less visible to the naked eye because it is lost in the Sun's glare during the day. Even the Moon looks washed out by day.

But Sun B would be different. Considering that it is 150 times as bright as the full Moon, it would be a clearly visible point of light even by day. Allowing the use of smoked glasses, it could be followed right up to the Sun.

Now the Greeks had a myth about how mankind learned the use of fire. At the time of creation, man was naked, shivering and miserable; one of the weakest and most poorly-endowed of the animal creation. The demigod, Prometheus, had pity on the new creature and stole fire from the Sun to give to mankind. With fire, man conquered night and winter and marauding beasts. He learned to smelt metals and developed civilization.

But the anger of Zeus was kindled at this interference. Prometheus was taken to the very ends of the world (which, to the Greeks, were the Caucasus Mountains) and there chained to a rock. A vulture was sent there to tear at his liver every day, but it left him at night in order that his liver might miraculously grow back and be ready for the next day's torture.

There now. Doesn't all this fit in perfectly with the apparent behavior of Sun B? Every year Sun B commits the crime of Prometheus. It can be seen in the daytime approaching the Sun, the only planet that can be seen to do this. It can only be planning to steal light from the Sun and it obviously succeeds. After all, isn't that why it is so much brighter than all the other planets, why it is so much brighter even than the Moon?

Moreover, it brings this light to mankind, for when it is in the night-sky, it illuminates the landscape into a dim kind of day.

But the planet is punished. It is cast out to the edge of the universe, further away than any other planet. There is even a vulture

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tearing at it, in the shape of its clearly visible satellite. While the planet was busy stealing fire from the Sun, no satellite was visible (because it was drowned out by the Sun's glare, of course.) Once the planet was hurled to the edge of the universe, though, and became visible in the night sky, its satellite appeared. The satellite swoops toward the bright planet, tearing at it, then moves away to allow it to recover, then swoops in again, and so on in an eternal rhythm.

With all this in mind, isn't it just about inevitable that if Sun B were in our sky, it would be named Prometheus? Or that the satellite would now have the Latin name "Vulturius."

Now I'm far too sober-minded and prosaic myself to think outlandish thoughts (as all of you know), but I wouldn't be surprised if some people reading this might not think the parallel is far too close to be accidental. Could it be that such a heavenly situation actually existed and suggested the myth in the first place?

Could it be that the human race originated on a planet circling Alpha Centauri A? Could they have migrated to Earth about fifty thousand years ago, wiping out the primitive Neanderthals they found here and established a race of "true men?" Could some disaster have destroyed their culture and forced them to build up anew?

Is the Prometheus myth a dim memory of the distant past, when Alpha Centauri B lit up the skies? Was the Alpha Centauri system the original of the Atlantis myth?

No, I don't think so, but anyone who wants to use it in a science-fiction story is welcome to it. And anyone who wants to start a religious cult based on this notion probably can't be stopped—but please, don't send me any of the literature, and *don't* say you read it here first.

And what effect would Sun B (or "Prometheus") have had on Greek science?

Well, in the real world, there was a time when matters hung in the balance. The popular Greek theory of the universe, as developed by 300 B.C., put the Earth at the center and let everything in the heavens revolve about it. The weight of Aristotle's philosophy was on the side of this theory.

About 280 B.C. Aristarchos of Samos suggested that only the Moon revolved about the Earth. The planets, including Earth itself, he said revolved about the Sun, thus elaborating a heliocentric system. He even had some good notions concerning the relative sizes and distances of the Moon and the Sun.

For a while, the Aristarchean view seemed to have an outside

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chance despite the great prestige of Aristotle. However, about 150 B.C., Hipparchos of Nicaea worked out the mathematics of the geocentric system so thoroughly that the competition ended. About 150 A.D. Claudius Ptolemy put the final touches on the geocentric theory and no one questioned that the Earth was the center of the universe for nearly 1400 years thereafter.

But, had Prometheus and Vulturius been in the sky, the Greeks would have had an example of one heavenly body, anyway, that clearly did not revolve primarily about the Earth. Vulturius revolved about Prometheus.

Aristarchos would undoubtedly have suggested Prometheus to be another sun with a planet circling it. The argument by analogy would, it seems to me, certainly have won out. Copernicus would have been anticipated.

Furthermore, the motion of Vulturius about Prometheus would have given a clear indication of the workings of gravity. The Aristotelian notion that gravity was confined to Earth alone and that heavenly bodies were immune to it would not have stood up.

Undoubtedly, Newton, too, would have been anticipated by some two thousand years.

What would have happened next? Would Greek genius have decayed anyway? Would the Dark Ages still have intervened? Or would the world have had a two thousand year headstart in science and would we now be masters of space? Or would we possibly be the non-survivors of a nuclear war fought in Roman times?

So that's how it goes. You start off checking on colored shadows in a science fiction story and end up wondering how different human history might have been (either for good or for evil) if only the Sun had had a companion star in its lonely voyage through eternity.

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NOTE: *Actually, Alpha Centauri is a three-star system, with a red dwarf star—the famous Proxima Centauri—circling the two large stars at a distance of nearly a trillion miles. I've had to leave out any discussion of that because the kindly editor, in the interests of publishing stories too, understandably restricts my space.*

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Lee Sutton is a librarian and English professor in Iowa, a poet, and the author of VENUS BOY *(noted here as one of the two best juvenile science fiction books of 1955). The following powerful story, of a somewhat strait-laced man and a somewhat loose-laced girl who fall into each other's minds, is not, we promise you, for children.*

Soul Mate

by Lee Sutton

THE CHURCH WAS A JUMBLED DISorder of towers, false buttresses and arches, reaching irrationally into nothing—but achieving peace. Quincy Summerfield rushed by it, down the stairs to the subway, intent only on his own kind of peace. He picked his way quickly through the crowds, avoiding the eyes that followed him. The chaos of people was an agony, but, because of the rain, he could have missed his train waiting for a taxi.

He settled himself behind a pillar near the tracks, looking cool and contained in his perfectly tailored covert coat and dark blue homburg, but inside he was trembling. He had had these periods before, when every set of human eyes seemed to open into agony and even the order and control of his office could not allay his sense of disorder in the presence of his staff. Seven interviews in a row had done it today. He had played seven men like instruments and had hired the five best for his company at $50,000 a year less than any other personnel man could have gotten them for. It was for this that he was paid. But now he would need a day or so of isolation. It might even be better to send away Charlotte, the wife whom he had schooled into order and control.

Just then a girl's rich laugh floated to him down the tunnel and he glanced around the pillar. A girl with a long black ponytail squatted just past the turnstiles, art portfolios propped against her legs. With distaste he noticed the full breasts thrust out against an over-bright blouse under an open, dirty trench coat. Her full mouth was deeply curved with laughter as she gathered up the miscellany of a spilled handbag; and she seemed to Quincy Summerfield the very essence of disorder.

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He pulled his eyes away from her. He had to force his eyes away from her. He was seized with the shocking conviction that he had known her all his life; yet another part of his mind knew that he had never seen her before. She was like a fragment of a nightmare that had wandered into daylight. He prayed she wouldn't be on the same car with him. She was not; as he went through the sliding doors, he saw her enter the car ahead of him.

Inside the car, Quincy looked quickly around him, and sensing her monumental calm, sat down beside a grey-haired woman with light brown skin. Out of the crowd of the ramp he felt a little better. He seemed almost the embodiment of dignity as he sat there, erect, his long slender face, with its clipped greying mustache, composed and calm. The effect was achieved, however, only by considerable effort.

A guard pushed open the sliding door at the end of the car. The girl in the trench coat teetered through, rich lips in a teeth-flashing smile. Her sloppy good humor seemed to reach out to everyone in the car. For a moment even the guard's sullen face came alive. She sank gratefully into the seat directly opposite from Quincy Summerfield, dropping her load of portfolios helter skelter.

Quincy Summerfield looked down, staring at the dull rain marks on his well-polished shoes. He felt her eyes on him. He began to shake inside again, and looked up. He looked deliberately away from her, as if in an attempt to ignore her so obviously she could not fail to notice the slight.

The sense of her presence was just too great. Even across the car he could feel the scent of her heavy perfume; it was deep with musk. His eyes were slowly drawn towards her: the pile of portfolios in disorder around her knees; the foolish, soaked ballet slippers on tiny feet. A squiggle of modernist jewelry, tied with a leather thong, nestled in the hollow of her throat. It was a distorted crucifix. All this messiness and the messiness of religion, too, he thought. But his eyes were drawn up to the curve of her lips. He was trembling even more; for no reason his feet ached with cold.

Then he met her clear, deep brown eyes; *lambent the word is. Such cool, gray eyes.*

He moved his feet. They were very cold. *That damned bra is much too tight . . .* His hand pushed up against his breasts. A drip from the homburg fell cool and sharp onto her nose. His breasts actually hurt. *A hot shower if the heater is fixed . . . Then I'll tell everyone about selling the picture . . . Charlotte will make me a warm drink . . . God, I'm feeling funny. I wonder if Arthur —would he believe? That's a dis-*

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tinguished disgusting looking girl how aristocratic homburg mustache low class slut.

My seeing's all wrong. That's me and there's no mirror. Who's Charlotte, Arthur, Quincy? I'm Quincy. I'm. . . . That man. That girl. Jesus, Jesus. I'm thinking his her thoughts. Let me out. Let me out!

"Let me out!" The girl's rising scream brought everyone in the car to his feet. She stood there a moment, her eyes rolling and wild, then collapsed to the concrete floor in a faint.

Quincy Summerfield was shaking from head to foot, his hands over his face, fingers digging into his eyes. He had been conscious of the lifting of a great weight as the world had whirled into darkness and the girl collapsed onto the floor. She was going to throw up. He knew. He could feel every sensation she had as she lay there in the half faint. He could feel his own gorge rising. People were lifting her up. He felt her eyelids flutter. The mirror, mirror, mirror of her being conscious of his being conscious of her being conscious of the colored woman with the sculptured calm taking her into her arms. Then the girl threw up horribly and his throat ached with the agony of her embarrassment.

The train came screeching to a stop. Quincy jumped up and ran blindly headlong through the sliding door. He all but knocked down an old lady entering. She hit after him with her umbrella.

"Young pup!" The words followed him down the ramp as he ran, his leather heels echoing through the noisy underground. His face was wild. People stopped in their tracks and stared after him, but he did not care. His hat fell off. He stumbled, almost fell. His head was awhirl with her seeing and his seeing, her thoughts and his thoughts. The turnstiles were just ahead. Soon he would be away, outside, away from all the people, away from the girl, into the open air.

The colored woman—she'll help me. She was picking up his pictures.

He pushed down a scream, and plunged through the tangled vision. He hardly knew how he got there, but finally, hatless, his trousers torn from a fall on the stairs, he was standing out in the street, flailing his arm at taxis.

Blessedly one stopped.

"Where to, Buster?"

"Grand Central. Hurry, for God's sake!"

Through images of her seeing, he looked at his watch. He had smashed the crystal in some way and his wrist was numb. He sank back into the slick upholstery, breathing hard. Exhausted, he closed his eyes and gave himself up to single vision.

His bra was too tight; he reached around, letting out the

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hooks and eyes and breathed more easily.

"Now, honey," a soft voice was saying, "you be fine. You just got something now to tell your husband." The brown face was smiling. "You do got a husband?"

"But I'm not pregnant!" He burst out, speaking as the girl spoke.

"What's that, Buster?" the taxi driver tossed over his shoulder. "You're not what?"

Quincy Summerfield opened his eyes and sat bolt upright. "Just thinking over some dialogue for a radio play," he said desperately.

With a grunt, the taxi driver went on driving.

Summerfield looked around him. It was a taxi, like any taxi. A small sign announced the driver was Barney Cohen. Outside it was raining. People leaned into the rain as they always did. He tried to push away the other images.

But he could not.

When he closed his eyes, he was in a dirty white, tiled lavatory, a vague stench of vomit and the scent of a musky perfume surrounding him. A women's lavatory. He was looking into the mirror at his white, shaking face, a woman's face with frightened brown eyes. He was putting on lipstick. *SHE is putting on lipstick,* he forced his mind to say. She shook her head and closed her eyes.

You're still here, she thought.

Yes.

What's happened for God's sake? There was the same desperate fear in her mind that he felt in his.

Fear. They shared their fear for a long moment.

Then he fought to bring his thoughts into order again. *Nothing to fear. Nothing. Just the same as I always was. Just the same. She, you just the same. She. Me. Just the same.*

Christ, Christ her mind intruded. *Our Father . . .* The prayer distorted into a jumble of religious images.

The depth of her superstitious outcry shocked him into steel-bright control, and he fought for domination. *There is nothing to fear.* He forced the thought through the images. *I am just the same. You are just the same. Somehow . . .* and for a second he slid out of control . . . *we have made total mental contact. I know what you think, feel what you feel, and you know my thoughts, my feelings.*

Under his controlling thought she calmed and contemplated his ideas for a moment. He could feel her mind reach out for the sensations of his body, his male body and he allowed himself to become fully conscious of hers, the femaleness of her.

A deep wave of erotic feeling took them both: him in the taxi,

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her a quarter of a mile away before the mirror. He could feel her breath quicken.

"But fabulous," she breathed aloud as her images of Arthur and Fred interlaced with his imaged memories of Charlotte.

Revulsion. He stamped down on the images as if they were pale, dangerous worms.

"Stop it!" he shouted.

"For Christ's sake, Buster, we got three blocks yet," the taxi driver growled, but swung toward the curb.

"Sorry. Thinking aloud again."

"Nuts," the taxi driver muttered. "A stooge for nuts, that's all I am," and cut back into traffic.

You're a cold, terrible man, thought the girl, swept by feelings of shame and hurt that were alien to her. *Things were just getting* . . . she searched for a word which meant good, but which would not betray her to his disapproval.

You're a slut, he thought savagely. He was deeply shaken, as by a nightmare. *I've wandered into a nightmare. Just like the nightmares I started having at fourteen. Are they connected? Were they reflections out of the mind of this terrible slut of a girl?*

Christ, you're a prig! the girl thought. She was very angry at him and at herself. Very deliberately she brought up an image of Arthur, a hairy young man with . . .

Setting his teeth, Quincy tried to force her thoughts away from the image forming in her mind and thus in his, but it was like trying to push back water—a deluge that was sweeping over him. He opened his eyes, almost to the breaking point, almost ready to scream. His mental pain hurt her into submission.

All right, all right, I'll stop. But you'll have to stop being nasty, too. After all, I didn't do this. I didn't try to bring us together this way. She was trembling with his pain.

"Okay, Buster. Grand Central."

Summerfield thrust a five dollar bill into the man's hand and rushed off into the crowd.

Five dollars! You gave that man five dollars! Why . . .?

Couldn't wait. Got to get my train. Get away. Far away. Then maybe I'll be rid of you.

Pushing through the people, her thoughts went on steadily through his mind. *Am I so terrible?* they came, touched with wistfulness.

Yes, he thought. *You are so terrible. Everything I cannot stand. Wretchedly superstitious. Involved in a messy affair with two men. Disorderly.*

Images of her apartment flashed into his mind: modern pictures askew, undusted. Garbage in the sink. *Everything I cannot stand.*

Then, for the first time he really knew her deep hurt as his own, as if he were committing violence upon himself. It was as if some

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rich and various part of himself, long suppressed, were alive again and in pain. For a fraction of a moment his mind reached out hesitantly toward her with compassion.

In spite of everything, she thought, *I rather admire you. Why, now we're practically soul mates.*

His revulsion at the idea was too deep to be stopped by any consideration of her or of himself.

I hope I can get rid of you, she thought, trying desperately to withdraw from him as from the violent touch of cruel hands.

But I'm afraid. I'm afraid. Those ESP men at Duke . . . Her mind sought wildly for a shadowy memory. *Didn't they shield their people with lead, separate them miles and miles?* And he got tangled pictures of men in white robes, separating "sensitive" people, shielding them in a variety of ways, but with no effect on their abilities to read each other's minds. He let his contempt slap at her at believing such nonsense.

But she was right. The edges of perception sharpened; they did not fade. There was no shutting her off. And there was always the continuing and horrible sense of familiarity. It was almost as if the eyes of his mind were being drawn against his will toward a disgusting part of himself held up in a mirror.

Going down the walk to his home he was conscious of her in her apartment. But he concentrated on holding his own line of thought. His home, its barbered lawns and well trimmed hedges, the whiteness and neatness of it, the pattern of twigs in the single tree was bringing him, momentarily, a pool of quiet.

Spare . . . bare . . . such crude design. The house was suddenly mirrored back at him from her mind. Suddenly he saw: *Petty bourgeois cheapness. All richness and complexity sacrificed to achieve a banal balance.*

Damn you.

Sorry. I didn't mean to hurt. But her laughter and scorn were still there under the surface.

And he couldn't help being infected by her thoughts. The landscape he owned and loved: *Poor stuff. Deliberately manufactured by a second rate artist for people with third rate taste.*

And Charlotte, so calm and sweet. Suddenly he saw how lost she was, the lines of frustration around her mouth.

Poor thing, the girl thought. *No children. No love. Then came* more than scorn. *You needed release and you've used her—just like the men you work with. You—*

There was no escaping her. Her scorn or shame or teasing laughter was omnipresent.

He didn't dare go back to work, for his confusion would have been

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noticed, and that was something he could not have borne. Luckily his post was high enough that he could make his own schedule, and could remain at home for a few days.

But the days were torture. There was not one flicker of his thought, one twinge of emotion the girl did not reflect. Worse, he caught all of hers. Not one of his her secret shabbinesses she he did not know. The tangled days ended only in nights where their tangled dreams were all nightmares to him. It was as if his whole life were being immersed in deep deep seas where nothing swam but strangeness which came echoing and reechoing through caverns of mirrors.

He lasted three days at home. During those three days he sought desperately for some reasonable explanation of the sudden, shocking contact that they had made. He half believed now that the knowledge of her had always been there, just below the surface, fended off, forcing itself up to his attention only when his defenses were down in sleep—the source of his strange nightmares. That day on the subway his defenses had been all but worn away by his work; and her defenses, were they ever up? Besides, she had just sold one of her silly pictures and was in love with the entire world of people. By the most fantastic of bad luck they had to meet just at that time. It was their eyes meeting that finally pierced the thin shells holding them apart. Maybe there was something to the Old Wives' Tales about the magic of meeting eyes, windows of souls. But all that was superstitious nonsense; he couldn't believe it.

He sought out one of the books by Rhine, but couldn't believe that either. He would have rather believed he was insane. Particularly he wouldn't believe that distance would make no difference. He decided to put a continent between them to see if that couldn't break the contact. He had Charlotte drive him to La Guardia field and he took the first plane west.

It was a bad mistake, for on the plane there were no distractions, and her presence remained as clear as it had always been. He could not move around. He found he could not force himself to concentrate on a book. Having been lucky enough to find a seat to himself, he couldn't engage anyone in conversation. There was nothing to do but lean back and close his eyes and live her life with her. That evening on the plane he became convinced that since he could not get rid of her, he must dominate her.

It was her peculiar religious notions which finally convinced him. She was walking through a tiny park at evening; it was spring and the trees were just beginning to bud. She paused before one tree,

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her stomach growling a little with hunger, sensing the city smells, the roar, the silence of the trees. *The tree reaches. Steely, reaching up among the stones of the city. Each bud tingles, leaves opening like angels' wings. Root tips reach down, tender in the dark. The smooth reach up of the branches. Like you, Quincy. Like the feel of your body, Quincy.*

And her eyes traced each line of the branches, following the angles, the twists. And as she reached the very tip of the tree, she felt something very terrible to him—a kind of ecstatic union with the life of the tree. And she glanced down then to where a pair of lovers were strolling, hand by hand, along the littered walk, her artist's mind stripping away their clothes, seeing their bodies almost as she had seen the tree. *The bodies are juicy, longing for one another, sweet muscles running along the bones. Aren't they lovely, Quincy?* she thought. *Look at the girl's hip thrust, the man's thighs. What a sweet rolling they're going to have.*

Can't you think of anything else?

I won't let you spoil it. It's too lovely an evening. And she turned toward a shabby little church. He had no desire to continue in such an unprofitable direction, and tried to steer her away from the church by playing on her hunger. She caught his purpose immediately and carefully concentrated on her own. She ignored his disgust and intellectual scorn as she entered through the arched doorway. There in the dimness she bought a candle, genuflected, and placed it before the Virgin.

It was a wordless prayer. For protection, for understanding. As she glanced up at the rather crude piece of statuary, she ticketed it for what it was, but moved beyond it to an inflated vision of feminine richness and purity. Here was woman, the full breast at which God tugged, utterly pure but female, bowels and womb, hunger and pain. *How she knows what I feel! So high, so beautiful, and yet she understands!*

Only after contemplating the Virgin did she turn to the crucifix. Here was all vigorous male sweetness, hanging from bloody nails. Quincy Summerfield tried to shy away, hold off this whole concept. He shaped an obscene word, but again the girl ignored him. Her feeling was too strong. The remoteness and terror and wonder and glory that was embodied in the tree and in the bones and blood of all men in their suffering, was richly present in the figure of the crucifix; *the timeless which betrayed itself into the agony of time out of compassion for* me *and* my *weakness.* She knelt in a submission to unreason that made Quincy there in the plane writhe in protest. But she was too sub-

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missive. He felt the position of her body as she knelt, and knew that she was a trifle off balance. Abruptly he willed a sudden small twitch of her leg and she went sprawling forward on her face. Quincy winced with the bump but jeered at her none the less.

That's mean—trying to make me look foolish.

Not any more foolish than kneeling before a piece of plaster. Disgusting. All that nonsense you have in your head. All that untruth.

She was furious. She pushed herself to her feet and stared at her dirty hands, down at the dust on her spring dress. She thought of a bath and quick meal, and left the church hurriedly. She ignored him, but as she went up the stairs to the apartment which, under Quincy's prodding, she had brought into some kind of order, she was still numbly angry.

What you did there in the church was shameful, she thought. *I'll get even with you. It's not all nonsense. It's all true and you know it's true. Of all the people in the world, why did I have to get you?*

She stripped deliberately before a mirror and watched herself so he would see her. It was a good body, high and full in the breasts, slender of waist, flaring and tapering down to the dirty feet. She ran her hands over it, under it, between, concentrating on the sensations of her fingers, feeling his responses to them.

Then abruptly she stopped and went to the phone and called her friend Arthur. She was tingling with desire and Quincy felt his gorge rise, even as his loins tightened.

I'm feeling lonely, Arthur. Could you come right over? I'll be in the bathtub, but come on in. All right then, join me if you want to.

Fifteen minutes later, Quincy staggered to the rest-room on the plane, locked himself in and sat down on the seat. With trembling fingers he took out his nail file and stripped back his coat sleeve. His jaw was tight, his eyes were a little mad. He looked for a place in the arm where it seemed large veins were not present. With one hard jab he stuck the nail file a half inch deep into his arm and forced himself to leave it there. Then he jiggled it slowly back and forth, letting the pain of it sweep over him in red waves, concentrating completely on the pain until the girl began to scream.

Get him out of there, he said through clenched teeth. *Get him out of there!*

And when, finally, a very bewildered Arthur was ejected from her apartment, as yet only half dressed, he pulled the nail file from his arm and let his head lean for a moment against the cool steel of the washbowl. He had learned

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how to control her. She could not stand his pain.

If it had not been for his own betrayal of himself, if his own revulsion had not been weak, she would not have been able to get as far as she had with Arthur. Still, in the end, it was his mind, not the anarchy of his body that had won out.

Lying there with his head against the steel, with his arm still bloody, knowing she was lying across the bed half-conscious with frustration and his pain, he took over control completely for a moment and pushed her up to a sitting position. She pushed herself up to a sitting position. She moaned slightly in protest, but allowed him to move her toward her closet, make her reach for her pajamas. He sensed that she almost enjoyed it. She enjoyed their complete rapport of feeling. And even with the pain in his arm, he found there was a certain joy in her emotion; and it was as if with his own mind alone he thought of what wholeness an experience together could be.

It was a peculiar moment for something like that to begin, but his steel-like control meshed together and held the rush of her emotion and his pain. Her admiration for his strength warmed him; she even shared in his triumph, and suddenly both of them found the experience good—not so much the experience itself but the perfect unity of thought and feeling that followed it.

Quincy cleaned his arm and bound it with a handkerchief, and when he went back to his seat the stewardess brought him his dinner. In her apartment the girl, too, ate, and their rapport persisted as they shared the savors of each others' food. He was firmly in control of their joint thought and feeling, but it was an experience richer than he had ever known. As they moved west, the desire for her physical presence grew and grew.

Wouldn't that magazine be shocked at our *togetherness?* she thought; and at that moment Quincy shared in her scorn of the bourgeois fetish.

They existed in that kind of rapport for the rest of the evening, he on the plane, she in the apartment, arranging it for his ultimate return. Even in sleep they remained almost joined into a single entity.

It was a strange period. Quincy got off the plane in San Francisco, and almost directly boarded another going non-stop back to New York. Less than twenty-four hours after he left New York, he had returned and was walking down her street toward her walkup.

But then things changed. The shabby Greenwich Village street was filled with her memories, and she began to take precedence. Everything around him now was a part of her. All of her life began to engulf him. Her terrible dis-

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ordered memories surrounded him, memories he could not repress.

He paused by the ugly little church where she had gone at times to make agonized confessions—only to dive back into the tangled messiness of her life again.

Not any more. Not messy any more. We'll be married and then . . .

He felt a blind impulse to enter the church to pour out his agony there. And find peace. Her impulse or his? He wrenched away. *Not now. Not ever . . .*

Only a few steps now . . . past the place where Fred and Arthur had fought that night. *Can't you stop remembering?*

And up five flights of ill-lit stairway, his mind filling with her anticipation. His mind filled with all the times she had gone up those stairs. His heart pounding with his anticipation. Knowing she was lounging there on the bed sofa in her blue dressing gown. Knowing the cocktail shaker was filled with martinis as only he could make them, dry and cold.

As his foot touched the landing he knew she was moving languidly from her couch toward the door, and her hand was on the door. And it was open. And she was standing before him.

Like a sleep walker he moved past her and into the room, sensing now the subtler perfume of her. And she closed the door and he looked around the room, utterly numbed.

Then feeling came back and he saw that the room was beautiful. The pictures in their wild excess were ordered into a subtle harmony by their arrangement. For all of the dirt ingrained in it, the furniture was better than his own expensive pieces. It was all fuller and richer and more harmonious than anything he had ever experienced.

And the girl standing there, her dark hair about her shoulders!

My God, you're beautiful. She was beautiful and his thought reflected back into her mind and she flushed with pleasure. And he sensed her admiration of his lean white face and gray mustache, and the strength of his mind, and the hard, lean feel of his body. And he knew the beauty of the room was completed by the two of them standing poised and not touching. Even the Crucifix in the corner blended with them into one harmonious whole.

And she he reached out to a bare touching of hands . . . pause . . . then a sweeping together in their arms. And he felt his chest against her breast, against her chest his breast. Her mouth against her mouth, her his mouths against . . .

Then the whole world went crashing out of control and there was nothing but the rawness of

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her passion and of his passion, her his—

Until his entire reason revolted and he could stand it no longer. The need to give way to the feel of his her mouth, this irrational disorder of giving and taking at the peak of sensation, this need he could not and would not meet. A fragment of himself broke away from the unity and grew, until the strongest part of his mind floated over the chaos of sensation and contemplated it with cold disgust. Not all of his mind, for part of himself was engulfed and protesting.

But part of him was icy and knew what to do almost as well as if he had planned it. He reached down into her memory and brought out her image of the purity of the Virgin draped sweetly in blue with the haloed babe in the crook of her arm. Deliberately he intensified the picture into an almost transcendent purity of spirit, vibrating with light and wonder. Instantly he wiped it out except for the blue robes, robes like her dressing gown, and filled them with the naked girl, her mouth agape in the throes of animal lust. Then back to the picture Virgin again, who moved slowly sorrowing, her eyes looking up.

The girl's eyes looked up and sought the crucifix in the corner of the room, and his mind expanded it before her eyes to the living man on the cross, straining in agony and in sorrow.

Quickly now. In complete control now of her whole mind and of his. *Passion—your passion.* He wiped away the Christ figure from her mind and mocked her with the writhing body of Arthur, and dissolved it into an image of his own face. And wiped that away to present the face of the suffering Christ. A gross female figure loomed, its mouth agape. *My mouth all horrible. No! No!! Me driving the phallic nails in those sweet palms! The bones making a crushing sound.*

The girl screamed, and broke away from Quincy Summerfield, her eyes wild.

That's what you are. That's what you know you are.

She covered her face with her hand, jerking this way and that, trying to get away from him. Trying to get away from his her acknowledgment of her naked self, while she he lashed herself with disgust.

It was enough. Quincy's mind contemplated her but did no more. It was only herself now that turned and ran, a decision shaping in her mind. She shaped the decision for herself and Quincy exulted in it, knowing that by her own insane standards she was damning herself.

She rushed weeping to the French windows opening on her little sundeck. She flung them open and did not pause but

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plunged on and out and over the parapet . . .

The railing smashed at his knees and he curled up suddenly with the pain, waiting the greater pain. He closed his eyes and set his teeth. Buildings tumbled through her eyes. Shrill sinking in the belly. A face flashed up from the street. Whirl of cars in the street. The fire hydrant rushed up red at her. The street plunged up, up, up. *Oh Chri—* The smash of red pain, unendurable to breaking!

Then there was a great darkness, a slow diminution of unconscious sensation. Then she was gone.

Quincy Summerfield pulled himself to his feet, and staggered toward a window. Peering through the curtain he saw the limp, twisted, huddled body near the fire hydrant, people running toward it.

She couldn't even die without a mess! he thought.

He left unobserved. He took the back stairs and there was no one to say that he had been there. A few blocks from her apartment, he hailed a cab and went to a hotel. He was utterly safe.

Oh, the blessed peace of it. She was gone, gone for good. There was nothing left of her disorderly presence but the gray emptiness a man might feel if he had lost an arm. There was still that: the gray ghostly taint of her. It was sure to pass, though, and this night he would sleep, really sleep for the first time in days.

He didn't even want Charlotte that night. He only wanted to be alone—and sleep. He hadn't been in the hotel room five minutes before he was in bed, and dozing.

Dozing, not sleeping. It wasn't that he worried about the thing he had done. It had been reasonable and right. Her own disorderly weakness had betrayed her. But there was the lingering gray sense of her presence that was not yet going away. That, and the feeling that he had lost half his life.

Lost?

No.

The sense of her presence was sharpening into a live reality. He was wide awake . . . or was it nightmare again?

No—she was there. She paid no attention to him. This was frightening.

She was focused unwaveringly upon a distant light, a light that grew, that became brilliant, with a searching intensity that she had never known before. And through it all, there was a sense of the wonder of longing changed into beauty that was all but unbearable.

And his mind was filled with a sense of richness and variety and order that he had never believed could exist.

But the searching light went on, and suddenly all her life burned through him in the flicker of a

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dream. And his life. And then out of the center of that purity of light there was a sorrowing, and she was moving away from the light. Away from the light, and he felt her whimpering like a child afraid of the dark. Away from the light . . .

Quincy Summerfield woke. Sat straight up in bed and screamed. The throat-tearing scream of a full-grown man in an agony of terror.

For the channel was wide open to the absolute chaos of her eternity.

AN EXPOSTULATION

(Against too many writers of science fiction)

Why did you lure us on like this,
Light-year on light-year, through the abyss,
Building (as though we cared for size!)
Empires that cover galaxies,
If at the journey's end we find
The same old stuff we left behind,
Well-worn Tellurian stories of
Crooks, spies, conspirators, or love,
Whose setting might as well have been
The Bronx, Montmartre, or Bethnel Green?

Why should I leave this green-floored cell,
Roofed with blue air, in which we dwell,
Unless, outside its guarded gates,
Long, long desired, the Unearthly waits,
Strangeness that moves us more than fear,
Beauty that stabs with tingling spear,
Or Wonder, laying on one's heart
That finger-tip at which we start
As if some thought too swift and shy
For reason's grasp had just gone by?

—C. S. Lewis

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A British import—by courtesy of the proprietors of Punch—offering a rather different outlook on the kind of men best equipped to win new planets and, possibly, friends. . . .

About Venus, More or Less

by Claud Cockburn

"OH, I SAY JONES, WANTED TO HAVE a word with you. Actually about Venus, more or less."

"Love that makes the world go round, sir."

"Quite. I mean to say have a cigar. Want you to feel, Jones, when you come into the Governor's office in this prison, well I mean, Jones, just because you're on a life stretch for that little matter, don't have to stand at attention and all that. What's spit and polish, Jones, compared to winning? I said it to Alanbrooke once and I'd say it again. You remember well as I do what Wellington called those British soldiers in the Peninsular War who saved the country? 'Scum of the earth.'"

"Didn't come here to be insulted, sir. There are regulations to deal with that type of outburst on the part of Prison Authorities. I've got M.P.s just like you have, sir."

"Just a quotation, Jones. Historical. Thought it pertinent for a moment. No offence, no offence."

"None taken where none intended, Governor. What seems to be on your mind?"

"As I said, it's about, as it were, Venus."

"Often wondered what they did with those arms. Archaeology seems laggard with a satisfying answer, sir."

"Not de Milo, old man. Planet. One, if I may say so, of our neighbour planets that we all want to get to know better."

"Green heads and death rays. Annihilate you."

"Ha-ha! Well you know, old lag, a lot of that's propaganda. Fact is, we were wondering—just me and a few of the fellows in Downing Street—how you'd care to pop out

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of here and have a look at those chaps. See how they're getting on —facing their problems, the spatial dilemma, production, all that sort of thing. Might be a lesson for all of us.

"Well, cheery-bye for now, sir. Been nice chatting with you."

"Just a minute, Jones. *Some* people have actually volunteered to make the trip—for Britain's sake. Man beats dog to planet. But you know what volunteers are, Jones. It's heroism and uncharted seas one minute and 'call me a neo-Elizabethan,' and next thing you know they're arguing about insurance, in case, well, in case of anything happening. Whereas a man in your position."

"Should be a dog's life, sir, if you ask me. Case for dumb friends."

"This isn't Russia, Jones."

"I've seen dogs that's delinquent just like me. So far's their limited intellectual and imaginative capacities permit, sir."

"Well, all I can say is, none of them is prepared to go. Bark like homicidal rapists and howl for their M.P.s just at the mere suggestion."

"Didn't come here to be insulted, sir."

"Sorry, Jones. No offence. Inadvertent thought-association. Well, what about it?"

"Pardon granted soon as asked, sir."

"*Mot juste*, I'd call that, Jones. *Mot* 'pardon,' I mean. It's what it'll mean for you. Unconditional. We'll parachute you down into the middle of Empire Day. Make Khrushchev look like a barrel of monkeys."

"Now there's an idea, sir. Monkeys."

"All on call for atom tests in South Pacific. If Britain's to hold her place in this modern Space of ours we're going to have to recognize that there's nothing left but manpower."

"Well, sir, if you put it like that. Any climate on Venus, sir, if I may ask?"

"I was just coming to that. You'll find it very home-like, so they tell me. Dense cloud all over the place most of the time. It says here 'The atmosphere is so permeated with fine particles of vapour up to its outer limit as to be only translucent without being transparent.' View of expert astronomer H. N. Russell."

"Smog, sir?"

"Smog all the way is what we hear. Permanent test to physique and character such as produced Britons such as we are to-day. Anyone can live on Mars. Venus is something different again. Needs something."

"Stamina, sir. Just one thing, sir. About the return trip. I'm essentially a home-body."

"Don't worry your head about that Jones. They're looking into that. Arrangements are being made. Something'll be laid on."

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"Oh, jolly good, sir. Well then, it's me for the Spacious Life."

"Just one word about that, Jones."

"Shouldn't wonder if I didn't have quite a spree up there, sir."

"That's what I mean, Jones. As you know, we here on earth know one another's little ways."

"Human, all too human, what?"

"Exactly. But you've got to remember that up there on Venus you're really what I might call an ambassador—representative of all that is best in our national character."

"You mean act with restraint? Study the manners and customs of the natives?"

"I don't mean to say you've got to lead a drab life there, Jones. But—just glancing through your record—h'm, h'm . . . well, just until you know what their attitude is toward, well, you know the kind of thing I mean, I'd go a little slow, Jones."

"Be a model of deportment, sir. All the same, nature's the same the whole space over, isn't it, sir?"

"I hope so, Jones. And jolly good luck to you."

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XV

In 2961, Ferdinand Feghoot persuaded the Council of Worlds to admit Little Stravinsky. After Dr. Hassan ben-Sabah had finished denouncing that planet, he said:

"Gentlemen, our learned colleague has accused the Little Stravinskians of 'the utmost barbarity'—even though they have achieved automation and space travel. Why? Because they cling to their old, picturesque customs. They shackle their King to his throne with a Chain of Gold which is their equivalent of the Crown. Every year, they choose fifty singers with seven-stringed harps to serve this Chain, as they put it, entertaining the Monarch with ballads and lays. At the end of each year, they have a great contest in which the singers belabor each other with whips until the last one on his feet gets the Grand Prize. Well, what of it?"

"The Grand Prize is a beautiful virgin!" screamed Dr. ben-Sabah. "She is called Miss Little Stravinsky of, say, 2961. The winner gets her for his concubine. It is shocking! Immoral! Uncivilized! Nothing like this ever happened on Earth!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Ferdnand Feghoot. "Why, we even have an old saying: Bards of a fetter flog to get 'er."

—Grendel Briarton

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Josef Berger—author of over a dozen books, ex-newspaperman, public relations expert—wrote this story 23 years ago. "At that time," he writes, "there were no magazines like F&SF. There was just no place for it to go." Mr. Berger's point—that Liberty is in danger—is not new to science fiction; his specific dramatic instance, however, is particularly haunting . . .

Maybe We Got Something

by Josef Berger

IF YOU CAN TAKE AN HONEST fisherman at his word when he tells you his vessel once fetched up the world's biggest statue from the bottom of the sea, it's all I ask.

It was her head that broke water, so help me, snagged in our trawl while we were dragging for haddock on Georges Bank. Been a couple of years since it happened, but what went on aboard our little schooner is froze in the mind of every last man of us like it was yesterday.

I can see us now, hauling in that twine. The trawl is slow coming up, sluggish and heavy, and putting an awful strain on the cables and the winch. I never seen it happen like that before. The air a fish carries in his insides buoys up the bag of the trawl—what we call the cod-end—so when you are hauling in on a good set, with plenty of fish in the bag, she comes up bobbing like a cork.

This time, while I am standing at the forward gallows, I can tell, even before I see it, it ain't going to be no fish we got in that bag. And if it's rocks off the bottom, then somebody must have shipped Gibraltar out here and dumped it!

The haul gets tauter and tauter, till it looks like something has got to part somewhere, and then I see her—the statue—laying there in the water, face up.

What a sight! All of copper, shining in the sun, the face of a woman, with a spiked crown on her head. What a thing to come staring up at a man from the water of lonesome Georges Bank! Two hundred miles out to sea!

It's only the head we've snagged. The rest of her is gone, parted at the base of the neck. But that head is as big as the whole of our vessel! And the longer I look at her the more aggravated I get

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with myself. You see, the face is familiar but the name slips my mind. Like somebody I might have known once, only an awful lot has happened in the meanwhile. The Big Change, for instance—twenty-odd years had gone by since the Big Change, and I knew I couldn't have seen her in all that time.

I calls aft. "Hey, skipper! We are fast to Mrs. Neptune!"

The skipper runs forward and stands alongside and stares down at the face that is riding there with a slow roll and looking up at the sky like some great drowned giant of a woman, calm and wet and giving back the sun from her forehead. And the skipper is a little aggravated too, but he steadies himself with a couple of curse-words and starts right off to gripe.

"Now, ain't that a fine catch! Our business is haddocking and we haul up a damned Sphinx!"

All the boys come crowding the rail now for a look. Old John, our twine man, is gaping like he sees ghosts.

"That ain't no Sphinx," old John tells the skipper.

"No? What is it, then?"

Old John ain't saying. He ain't telling all he knows. And all the rest of us have it on the tip of our tongues—all, that is, but young Jimmy Clay—but we can't none of us place her exactly. We just stand there and suck wind.

But of all the peculiar looks on the faces in that crew, the most peculiar is young Jimmy Clay, while he sits up in the bow and looks down on that face in the sea. Jimmy ain't hardly more than a boy, you see, with a smooth jaw and a young boy's wide-open eyes. He wasn't even born when the Big Change come, so naturally, he ain't got anything to even try to remember back to, like the rest of us have. Not even any pictures, since they had the book-burning that come with the Big Change. And now Jimmy's eyes have got a queer kind of a smile in them, the kind a kid out there might get when he's thinking of home, maybe, or maybe of his girl. And that smile is froze to his face like he's been spellbound. He stares and stares, and without taking his eyes from that statue, he says:

"God, ain't she beautiful!"

Sam, our engineer, don't agree.

"I wouldn't trust her at the far end of a spare gaff," Sam says. "Too damn good-looking."

To hear Sam talk brings us all back again with our feet on the deck. Sam's that kind of a feller. The skipper wakes up and says:

"Well, she can be the seven wonders of the world, but that still don't leave us nowheres except on Georges Bank dragging for haddock and snagged with a fine load of junk. We got to get clear of her right away and save what we can of the net."

"Just a minute, skipper," I says.

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"It looks to me like maybe we got something we hadn't ought to cut adrift." I don't know why I said it . . . maybe it was that look I seen in Jimmy's face.

"Why not?" the skipper wants to know. "She won't go floating derelict—she'll sink right back to the bottom."

"Sure she will," I says. "But this here statue has been missing a long time now. They must have cut her up and towed her way out here when the Big Change came. Maybe, if we was to bring this here head ashore, there's some folks—the older ones—that would remember and could tell us who she is. And maybe there's some—the young ones—that would *like* to get a look at her."

"You can tell 'em about it when you get home," the skipper says. "You can draw 'em a pitcher."

"If we did tow her in," one of the boys says, "what would we do with her?"

"Might give her to a museum," I says. "Museums are always looking around for things like this, things that are gone a long time and forgotten."

All the boys start arguing, one way and another—all except young Jimmy Clay. He is still sitting up in the bow with his eyes on that statue, like he is having a spell of the shock.

"God!" he keeps saying, out loud but not to anybody in particular. "God, but she's beautiful!"

"See?" I tell the rest of the boys. "The kid kind of likes the cut of her jib. That's what give me the idea of saving her. Why, I bet if we towed her ashore, folks would come in special air trains from all over the country just to have a look at her!"

But Sam shakes his head. "I still don't like her looks. Good-looking women like that, a man can't trust. We better get on with our fishing."

Well, I am not the man to pass up a good bet, and when I look at Jimmy Clay again, I keep arguing not to cut that face adrift. I just can't help it. It would be easy enough, I says to the skipper, to make her fast with a couple of extra cables and tow her into Boston. But one thing is sure—once we let her go, we won't never see her again.

"Supposing nobody wants her," I says. "All right, then we scrap her. You can always find somebody that hopes to make money on what's left of a thing like that."

Still the skipper ain't sold. He stands there, scratching his chin. We are all waiting for him to make up his mind, and nobody says anything until little Jimmy Clay pipes up again.

"God, but she's—" he stops and tries to think up a word that will do to get it out of his system, and squirms like a tied eel when he can't find what he wants. And all he can say is, "She's—*beautiful!*"

The skipper looks at Jimmy.

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Then he turns and looks again at the statue. And back at Jimmy again. He is puzzled now, and studying it over.

"If I was to take the trouble of towing her in," he says, like he's talking to himself, "I don't know as I'd want to sell her for the scrap metal that's in her. No, I don't know! Might be a good notion to set her up some place, maybe rent a vacant lot in Boston. I could anchor her there in a big block of concrete, so's nobody could take her away." And now his eyes get to shining too, but it ain't the same kind of a shine that's in the kid's. "Then I could put up a good high fence around the lot, and I could let folks in to have a look at her—folks willing to pay my price."

Well, we are still fishing on shares, the same way fishermen have always worked the world over. I know it's kind of oldfashioned. I've seen lots of things changed during my time, but I guess nothing will ever change the system of going on shares that us fellows stick to. And the more I hear of the skipper's talk, the less I like it.

"*You'd* let folks look at her!" I says. "On *your* private lot! What about me? What about the rest of the boys? We're all entitled to our shares."

He comes out of his pipedream and looks me up and down.

"You get your share when we catch fish," he says. "You ain't out here to pick up souvenirs. It's my vessel, and when I tow that statue in, the whole of it is going to belong to me, to do with like I damn please."

"Well," I says, "do as you damn please, then. But don't give me no orders to work. Don't tell me to pass any cables to her. Whether it's haddock I fish or your aunt Sophrony's spare corset, I share and share alike with my shipmates."

Old John, the twine man, has been fishing since before most of us was born. He was fishing with the skipper's pa when the skipper was still in three-cornered pants. Now Old John goes over to the skipper and lays a hand on his shoulder.

"He's right, lad. It's always been share and share alike."

Well, the skipper knows I'm right, but that only makes him madder. "I'll decide what's right on this vessel!" he yells. "And I'm warning you, John, you better keep out of this." Then he turns to the rest of the boys. It is starting to breeze up a little, and the water is working into a chop. The statue, two seas off, is whipping the slack out of our trawl-cables with a noise like the crack of a gun, and big holes are showing in our net. "Now, step lively, you fellers! Make that statue fast before she parts what's left of the trawl!"

But the boys don't show willing to carry out orders. One by one they let the skipper know each

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man expects his share. Then, with his fists doubled up, the skipper walks over to me.

"This is your doing," he says. "It's up to you to tell these fellers you're going back on the job—and I mean now!"

"Any time you say, skipper," I says. "Soon's I hear what my share in that statue amounts to."

"You'll obey orders," he says, "or I'm going to knock the hell out of you."

But I just point to the statue. "More I look at her, skipper," I says, "the more I figure you can knock the hell out of me if you're man enough, but you don't get my share."

So he takes a swing at me, and he pretty near does knock the hell out of me. But I get back to my feet, and now it's my turn to swing, and I pretty well serve him the same.

Old John tries to step in between us. "We got to do something about the way those cables are snapping," Old John keeps saying. "We got to do something quick."

But I don't have time to listen to him now. The skipper lands me a stiff one on the nose and hollers, "Share, eh? A year in sick bay—that'll be your share when I'm done with you!"

I come right back with a clout that jams up his jawtackle and sends him into the scuppers. "If you can't give us what's coming to us," I says, "you won't get anything, you old pig-eyed pirate!"

I feel Old John again, pulling at my arm.

"We are losing her," Old John is saying. "She will slip away. Nobody is watching her—nobody but me and the boy."

But the skipper is back on his feet again, and we close in for another go. We trade a few more, when all of a sudden we hear a long rip of the twine, a sharp crackle of splintering wood, and somebody yells:

"She's clear! The gear has parted!"

All hands go back to the rail. Me and the skipper forget our scrap now, and I see it's true. Clear she is, and gone she is, for she has ripped our gear to hell, and now that calm, shining face fades out before our eyes as she settles back under the green water. And all we can do is stand there and watch her as she goes. She is too big for us.

Nobody has anything to say. The skipper is standing side by side with me at the rail, watching. Old John is behind us, with a hand on each of us. Watching too. And shaking his head.

Young Jimmy Clay is doused with the spindrift that flies in over the bow. His face is wet with it. But he still sits there. There is still that spellbound look in his wide eyes.

"God!" says young Jimmy Clay. "God, but she was beautiful!"

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We have often thought how pleasant it would be to sit in on a tale-telling session in the White Hart, with Arthur C. Clarke's Harry Purvis, P. G. Wodehouse's Mr. Mulliner, Lord Dunsany's Jorkens . . . and Robert Arthur's Murchison Morks, who presents his glossy credentials herewith.

The Hero Equation

by Robert Arthur

"THE AGE OF HEROES IS OVER!" Walters said. Walters is the explorer member of our club, and he has always been a bit resentful that there are no more poles or continents for him to discover. "The world is too crowded now. It's impossible for an individual to rise above the mob and affect history any more."

"What about Hitler? Stalin? Or Mussolini and Nasser, if you want small scale examples?" Peterson asked.

"Oh, those!" said Walters. "I'm talking about heroes, men who achieved fame for doing something worthwhile. No, the age of heroes and heroism is over."

"Not necessarily." It was Murchison Morks who spoke. Morks had been busy with a double Calvert and soda until that moment. "I had a friend, a perfectly ordinary, nondescript friend named Alexander Peabody who—"

"Became a hero, I suppose?" Peterson asked skeptically.

"I was going to say that he was a professor," Morks went on, unruffled. "Of mathematics. In a small college up in New England. He was a good mathematician, but he did have dreams like other men. Dreams of adventure, romance, fame. But of course New England isn't a very good place for those things these days."

"Nor is any place else!" asserted Walters. "Neither your friend the professor nor anyone else has a chance to become a real hero any more. In an earlier day, now—"

"Exactly what my friend decided," Morks said. "That this is not an age for adventure or heroism and if he wanted a chance at such things, he'd have to go back to an earlier age. So, after many years of labor over his tables and figures, he finally devised the hero equation."

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"And exactly what was the hero equation?" demanded Peterson.

"A mathematical equation," Morks said calmly, "that, if concentrated upon firmly, would enable my friend to project his personality back into an earlier age in the world's history. He was sure it would work. But when he confided his dreams to his sister Martha, she, woman-like, merely sniffed. She called him a goose. Her words, I might add, produced a strange outcome indeed. . . . But in order to make myself clear, I shall have to tell you the whole story, just as my friend related it to me. If I could have something to keep my throat moist—"

I called the waiter. And signed the chit. Murchison Morks was too busy talking.

Professor Alexander Peabody [said Morks] opened his eyes and blinked at the strange landscape, with his sister Martha's sarcastic words still ringing in his ears. For a moment he felt dizzy, and his head buzzed queerly with Martha's blunt admonition, "Don't be a goose, Alexander!" seeming to echo through the buzzing.

But some unpleasant symptoms were only to be expected. After all, his personality had just hurtled a gap of hundreds of years and taken up temporary abode in a strange body. Such a violent shifting about of the essential ego could not be accomplished without a certain amount of stress and strain.

Gradually the buzzing ceased, the dizziness passed away, and Alexander Peabody, his eyes glistening with excitement, began to examine the details of his surroundings.

He seemed to be sitting on the grassy bank of a small pond, about which grew rushes of unusual height—they reached well above his head. Beyond them stood a line of curious trees. They were twisted and gnarled, and bore glossy green leaves, but their height astonished him. If they had not been so tall, he would have called them olive trees. But olive trees eighty feet high— No, they must be some new species.

Professor Peabody started to rise from his sitting position, but quickly sat down again. His legs felt odd. All the muscles of his body seemed strange and uncoordinated. And the movement had brought back the dizziness.

That, no doubt, was due to the fact his personality was not yet adjusted to the new body it had taken. Professor Peabody decided to wait for a few moments, until he became a little better integrated, before starting out to explore the surroundin[illegible].

There was, after all, no tremendous hurry. It had taken him twenty years of preparation to reach this moment, and if it had

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not been for Martha's sarcasm, he might not even yet have summoned up the courage to take the plunge.

But for Martha to show such incredulous amazement when he had told her that he was tired of teaching physics in a jerkwater college to seventy adolescent intellects, and that he had determined to experience at least once in his life danger, adventure, excitement, and perhaps romance—that had been galling in the extreme.

And Martha's incredulity had come out in explosive words when he had added that the great, secret yearning of his existence was to affect the course of history in some manner, however slightly, so that he would not have to die knowing that for all his living had mattered to the world, he might as well have been a vegetable or a tree.

"Don't be a goose, Alexander!" she had exclaimed. "History isn't made by men like you!"

And she had gone out, slamming the door to his study and workroom, before he could even explain his equation.

There was no doubt, Professor Peabody thought—tentatively twisting his head about and finding that the dizziness was almost gone—no doubt that she was partially right. He was small and unimpressive, and the fact that his baldish cranium held a very sound store of knowledge concerning theoretical physics was not indicated by his horn-rimmed spectacles, his long, thin neck, or his receding chin.

But it had been no part of his intentions to seek to affect the course of history in the age in which he lived, overrun as it was by Hitlers, Stalins, and Mussolinis. No, his scheme had been at once simpler and more involved than that. His plan, if Martha had only waited to hear it, was to return to an earlier and less sophisticated era, when his knowledge, intelligence, and general abilities would loom far larger than they did in the twentieth century.

He could do it. Once, at least. That he had known. And if Martha had only listened, he could have given her the gist of the equation which would force his personality back through the time-pressure of vanished centuries, into some corporeal body that had lived long ago.

But Martha had not waited to hear.

"After all, Martha," Alexander Peabody had said with quiet dignity, "I seem to remember that another Alexander made history once."

But he had said it to a closed door. Perhaps it was just as well. If Martha had stayed, there was no telling what she might have retorted.

The proof, after all, was that,

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smarting under the sting of her words, he had cast timidity to the winds and gone ahead with his plans and—here he was!

Professor Peabody opened his eyes wide, blinking. In the momentary confusion of those first few minutes, he had quite forgotten to wonder *where* he was, in what land he found himself. And for that matter, in what century, what year. He chuckled to himself at the realization. Certainly, before he could plan any moves, he must know those two things.

And a third, equally important. The identity of the body in which his ego now—

Alexander Peabody, glancing down at himself automatically, ceased thinking with horrid abruptness. And his brain reeled in a wild dizziness a dozen times worse than it had before.

He was—he was covered with white feathers!

Involuntarily Professor Peabody shuddered and closed his eyes, keeping them shut lest the sickening dizziness that rocked him unstring him completely. In heaven's name, what—what—

Then he was startled by a lilting, feminine voice.

"Hello, handsome," it said. "What're you doing way off here all by your lonesome? How about coming for a swim? I know a place where we can get some dandy mud worms."

Alexander Peabody's eyes remained shut. He did not want to be impolite, but the unknown female would have to wait for an answer until he felt less giddy. Besides, in his present distress he certainly didn't want to go swimming, and mud worms were the last things he would have desired. Perhaps mud worms were part of the national diet here; but even if they were, they were an item he intended to forego.

Some corner of Alexander Peabody's reeling brain found itself wondering, however, what language the girl was speaking. He had prepared himself for his great adventure by learning a bit of Old English, Old French, Latin, and Sanskrit, and he knew it was none of these. It was a curiously harsh, hissing, clacking tongue that she spoke, though he seemed to find a certain musical charm in it.

"Okay, stuck-up!" the girl spoke again. "Don't answer. Sit there and moult, for all I care!"

Professor Peabody heard a splashing in the pond, and though he still felt unwell, opened his eyes and stared around wildly. But there was no girl to be seen. There was no one and nothing, save a large white swan swimming away across the little lake, her tail seeming to express disdain.

No, not a swan, though she looked big enough to be one. A—a goose. And—and—it could only

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have been she who had told him to 'sit there and moult.'

"Great heavens!" Professor Peabody groaned aloud, his voice harsh and strange in his ears. "Then I *am* a—a—"

He could not say it. But he did not have to. It was a thing that admitted not the slightest doubt. The goose had been talking to him because *he* was a goose, too!

Something of wild despair sang in Alexander Peabody's brain. All his dreams, and his work, all the risks he had taken had come to this. He had set out to find adventure, to know romance, to affect history; and he had wound up as a barnyard fowl!

His sister Martha was to blame, of course. With those damnable final words, she had set up some psychic mental twist which must have led him, when the time transference of his ego was accomplished, into this feathered body.

But it did not matter who was to blame. What mattered was that the thing had happened. He would have wept, if a goose had been capable of tears; have sobbed aloud, if a goose could cry.

Then, bit by bit, he got a grip on himself. He was not an uncourageous man—goose, rather. And he still had his intelligence. Handicapped he was, but perhaps all was not lost. In any event, it behooved him to learn what he could of this time and country in which he found himself.

With that decision, he rose and started for the water. Getting tangled in his own webbed feet, he fell, severely twisting his neck, but rose without a murmur and, exercising more caution, attained his goal. He settled comfortably down upon the surface of the pond, and found natural instincts enabling him to swim with ease.

Floating thus on the pellucid surface, he arched his neck and found that he could examine his appearance by staring at the inverted reflection of himself.

He was, undeniably, a goose. But queerly he gained a crumb of comfort from the fact that he was a large goose, a handsome one, with a long, flexible neck, splotched by a black mark about the size of his former bow-tie; a large, well-shaped head; bright eyes, with a curious dark ring about them, as if he wore spectacles; and a sturdy, well-muscled body.

Experimentally he flapped his wings. Though he did not rise from the water, the effort made him move with good speed across the pond. Swiftly enough, in fact, to gain on the goose that had spoken to him.

Alexander Peabody found himself hurrying after her as she swam toward a small stream. He even found himself admiring her, in a way. She was young, stream-

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lined, a pure dazzling white, with a coquettish flirt to her tail. And she had called him handsome.

It was a new experience to Alexander Peabody to be called handsome, and even coming from a goose it was pleasant. It might be entertaining to converse with her. . . .

Professor Peabody coughed—or tried to—abruptly. Obviously a strong residue of personality remained in the feathered body he now inhabited. His thoughts seemed to be part human and part goose. He must not let himself become confused. It was absurd to think of himself, Alexander Peabody, B.S., M.S., and Ph.D., admiring a barnyard fowl. However, since he seemed to be able to communicate with her, she would perhaps be a source of much-needed information.

A moment later he drew alongside her and slowed.

"Er," he began tentatively. "That is—ah—good afternoon."

It was remarkably difficult to think what to say to a goose, and his initial effort drew no response. Professor Peabody tried again.

"I—that is, I hope I wasn't rude, just now," he said humbly.

His companion tossed her head, and he caught her peering at him from the corners of small, bright eyes. Still she said nothing.

"The truth is," Peabody continued, "I was a bit dizzy, and I had my eyes closed."

"Oh, that's all right," Miss Goose said now, evidently considering his apology humble enough. "I know how it is. You can call me Edna."

"Ah—Edna," Professor Peabody repeated. "A pretty name. But I was wondering, Miss—er, Edna, if you could tell me the date."

"Date?" Edna looked at him in puzzlement.

"I mean, what year is it?"

"Year? What is a year?"

"Uh—that is, it doesn't matter," Professor Peabody answered. Naturally, a goose could be expected to know nothing of time. "But perhaps you can tell me where we are, though?"

"Where?" Edna glanced at him coquettishly, sidewise. "Why, here, of course."

"Yes, quite so," Professor Peabody agreed, a little desperate. "But where is here? I mean, what is the name of the place?"

"Name?" Edna said. "It hasn't any name. It's just here. There's only two places—here, and there. And we're here."

"Thank you." Peabody sighed: as nearly sighed as he could manage. "To be sure. May I also inquire where this stream upon which we now seem to be swimming takes us?"

"How you do talk!" Edna exclaimed, pleased. "I never heard language like you use, before. Why, it takes us to the river. Where the people are."

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"Ah!" Peabody brightened. "The river. And people. You don't know their names, do you?"

Edna shook her head, her lissome neck undulating pleasantly. "Do people have names?" she inquired.

"Yes," Alexander Peabody told her absently, for a bend in the stream down which they swam so companionably had brought into view a town.

It was not a very imposing town, being merely a largish aggregation of stone and wood houses on the edge of the river into which the stream flowed. But beyond it, on the crest of a hill, was a more imposing structure, almost a fortress, with stout stone walls.

Within the confines of this stronghold Professor Peabody glimpsed the tops of buildings, and he caught sight of human beings on the walls, scanning the horizon in the manner of sentinels.

"Where is that?" he asked eagerly, and Edna looked toward the town.

"That's just home," she said. "It's sort of dull. Nothing ever happens there. I just came out for a swim, and because I was hungry for some mud worms. Would you like some? I know a dandy place to get them."

Something within Alexander Peabody quivered.

"No, thank you," he replied hastily. "No mud worms. I—uh, I'd like very much to see where you live."

"Would you?" Edna seemed pleased. "Then come along. What is your name, anyway, good-looking?"

"Call me Alex," Professor Peabody suggested.

"Alex. I like that name," Edna told him warmly. "It's a good name for a big, strong fellow like you. All right, Alex. We swim down to that dead tree, then we go up the path, and there's a hole in the wall. . . ."

Forty minutes later, Professor Peabody squeezed through a crevice in the stone wall of the fortress and found himself inside. The route Edna had led him had taken them near no human beings. But now there were plenty of people in sight. There were numerous buildings of stone within the walls, and one large one in the center that was really very imposing, with lofty pillars and broad marble steps.

The streets were muddy, and filled with refuse, but no one seemed to mind. Individuals strode along about their business, skirting the worst puddles and giving no heed to the garbage.

A short distance away was what seemed to be a market. Nothing was for sale, however, save a few small carcasses of what Professor Peabody, with some distaste, re-

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alized were rats, and these were being bought by housewives in loose white gowns, amidst much bargaining.

All the men in sight were armed, either with swords or pikes, or both. All wore tunics of white cotton or homespun, and most had leather jerkins or at least leather straps outside these, from which shields were suspended. Professor Peabody realized that he should be able to tell from the dress of the inhabitants where he was. But he couldn't. He was, after all, a scientist, not a historian; and though something struck a familiar note in his mind, he could not place it.

However, whoever they were, he must somehow make contact with them, communicate in some manner that the body of the fowl he now wore concealed a human soul and mentality. And in this endeavor, Edna's presence was going to be a drawback. He must part from her.

Yet, curiously, the thought caused him regret. In the last hour he had found her company quite pleasant. Quite pleasant, indeed.

He was turning his next move over in his mind when he observed a large, white fowl approaching them. It was another goose, a male goose, in fact, and it waddled toward them with an arrogance of mien that Alexander Peabody found distasteful.

"Why, it's Carl!" Edna exclaimed, with a little hiss of interest. "Dear me, Alex, I should warn you: Carl is very fond of me."

"He is, is he?" Professor Peabody responded, finding, to his own amazement, that there was a distinctly ominous tone in his voice.

"Hello, Edna," the oncoming Carl hissed. "Where'd you pick up that mangy-looking bird with you?"

"He's a gentleman friend of mine," Edna answered, with a toss of her head, "We've just been having a little walk together."

"You have, have you?" Carl fixed a beady eye on Alexander Peabody. "Well, tell him to take another walk, before I kick his feathers off."

"Huh!" Edna answered, provocatively. "I guess he can take care of himself. Can't you, Alex?"

"Eh?" Alexander Peabody felt a certain alarm. Carl's intentions were obviously hostile. And despite the curious urge within him to reciprocate that hostility, Professor Peabody was after all a man of peace, who had never engaged in a conflict in his life. "Why—why—"

Carl gave him no chance to make up his mind. Hissing and clacking, Carl charged.

Carl was large, and obviously of a bellicose nature. His first rush knocked the professor from his feet. While he lay on his side, beating his wings and giving out

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cries of distress, Carl plucked large handfuls of feathers from his anatomy and strewed them to the winds. Then with his powerful beak he nipped Peabody in numerous places, all of which hurt.

Ruffled and flustered, Peabody scrambled to his feet and attempted to strike back. But he was unaccustomed to combat and Carl, his long, powerful neck weaving and twisting, beak thrusting with the speed and dexterity of a fencer's foil, bore down on Alexander Peabody in so fearsome a manner that the professor's courage gave. He turned and fled.

As he squawked down the street, feathers flying, wings beating, Carl took a few last nips; then ceased, to return to Edna.

"There he goes," Peabody heard his rival hissing behind him. "You won't see that bird again, bright-eyes."

The professor turned a corner, and skidded to a wobbly stop as he almost ran into the legs of a man hurrying up a flight of marble steps. At first he'd thought it was a woman, because of the white draperies fluttering about the sandaled feet.

But the harsh voice that spoke was distinctly masculine, and what it said, in a language that Professor Peabody knew at once, was, "Be gone from my path, bird, befor I kick you loose from your giblets! On my word, if you weren't sacred to Minerva, I'd wring your neck and pop you into the cooking pot, or my name's not Marcus Manlius!"

A glow of excitement overspread Professor Peabody, even as he fluttered to one side. The language was Latin. And he must be —yes, the hill and river made it positive. He was in Rome.

Exultation flamed in Peabody's breast. Rome! At an early date, obviously, for the place was not much more than a provincial village. But Rome, whence most of the world's history emanated for a thousand years!

He must communicate with the inhabitants quickly, learn the date, discover into just what stage of Rome's history he had been precipitated. Then, having all the facts, he could put his brain and intelligence to work; and handicapped though he was by the ignominious body of a goose, he might yet triumph over his misfortune.

He scuttled up the muddy steps and got ahead of the ascending man. The fellow strode with the air of a commander. If he could make him understand, somehow.

. . .

Professor Peabody summoned his best Latin.

"*Hic, haec, hoc!*" he shrilled at the glowering Marcus Manlius, to get his attention. "*Omnia Gallia in tres partes divisa est!* Listen, please! I'm a friend. It's all a mis-

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take that I look like a goose. I must talk to you!"

To Professor Peabody, waiting expectantly, the purest of Latin seemed to have tripped off his tongue. But the togaed one only glowered.

"Cease, fowl, your hissing and clacking!" he roared at Professor Peabody. "By the gods, you make my ears ring! If it weren't for the blessed Minerva's protection, I'd break you into seventy-seven bits. Now, out of my way!"

Dismayed, Professor Peabody tried to scuttle aside. He was too slow. A foot, with an unpleasantly prominent big toe, caught him just beneath the tail feathers. He sailed through the air and down the steps, and was falling like a stone when some instinct remembered he had wings.

Gasping for breath, Professor Peabody spread his wings, flapping furiously. But unacquainted as he was with the art of flight, something went wrong. He went into a side slip, then into a stall, and in getting out of that, into a tailspin. A moment later he made a one-point landing on the bottom step that slammed all remaining breath from his body.

On the steps above, harsh laughter sounded. Then Marcus Manlius was gone.

Slowly Professor Peabody recovered his breath, his wits, and his courage. He had failed to make the man understand. Probably his accent had been wrong. Or more likely, his vocal cords were not adapted to clear reproduction of human speech.

Yet somehow he must communicate with the Romans, or twenty years of labor and a lifetime of ambition were gone for nothing.

It was a problem requiring the utmost concentration. He decided to stroll about the town while he pondered it. Something might occur to furnish him inspiration. Besides, he did not feel like sitting down. Not just now.

Slowly and with dignity, Professor Peabody proceeded down the muddy lane that served for a street. From the corner of his eye he saw Edna and Carl strolling in the other direction. For a moment a hot flush of humiliation that he had let Carl rout him flooded Peabody. Then, resolutely putting trivial personal matters from his mind, he concentrated on how to communicate his intelligence to the Romans.

He strolled past another market place, but did not pause. The glances given him by the housewives haggling over the rat carcasses made his skin crawl. He was glad when he turned a corner that hid him from the hungry women's sight.

Then his eyes brightened. Seated on a doorstep ahead of him, to get the last light of the afternoon, was an individual carefully marking on parchment with a quill pen,

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which he dipped now and again into a pot of ink beside him.

Hope rose in Professor Peabody. A scribe, an educated man. Such a one as he might hope to make his identity known to. He approached cautiously. The intent scribe, a scrawny fellow with a bald spot in the middle of his pate, took no notice of him. Peabody went closer.

If, he thought, he could take the quill pen in his mouth—his beak, rather—and write a message with it. No, that was impractical. But still—

He cleared his throat. He'd try speech again first. He did, uttering a few preliminary sentences, but the scribe only glanced up in annoyance.

"Shoo!" he said. "Get hence, bird. No, pause a moment!"

Alexander Peabody, having started back, stopped. The scribe's expression was more friendly. Taking heart at this sign of interest, Peabody bent his neck, inserted his beak into the smooth mud beside the doorstep, and began to make awkward capital letters.

"H-I-C," he wrote, sprawlingly but plainly. "H-A-E-C . . . H-O-C."

Triumphantly he stood back. There! That would demonstrate he was intelligent. Get the scribe's attention. Then he would write a real sentence. Then—

He looked up. The scribe was poised above him, but not to read what Peabody had written. The fellow made a swift grab at him. A large hand seized his wing. Pain shot through Professor Peabody. He leaped forward, straight between the fellow's legs. His wings flapping, he shot into the clear, and behind him the scribe tottered, grabbed at air, and with fearful cursing sat down with a resounding smack in the mud—fair on the words Alexander Peabody had written!

Peabody groaned. The furious writer was struggling to his feet, with a handful of feathers and a stone. He hurled the stone. Peabody dodged, and was around a corner before the second could come.

Curse the fellow! He had only wanted some feathers to make new goose quill pens. Using him, Professor Alexander Peabody, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., as a source of writing materials!

Then Peabody's neck sagged, his tail feathers drooped. Evening was coming on, and a cold, raw wind was whisking through the streets of Rome. He'd failed to communicate with anyone, and gloomily he could see that no matter what he tried, he'd fail again. Who would pay any attention to a goose?

He sighed, and then out of an inner anger at the treatment fate was according him, a determination crystallized. He'd go back, and see Edna again. Maybe she

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was just a goose, but she was company, someone to talk to, and he was lonely.

And Carll Pugnacity stirred in Professor Peabody. The fellow had taken him unaware. If he could find him now, he'd thresh him to within an inch of his life!

He turned about, and went in search of Edna and Carl.

A curious thing was happening to Alexander Peabody, and he was only half aware of it. The residue of goosish personality in the body his ego was inhabiting seemed to be coloring his thoughts and actions. He was gradually losing interest in human affairs, even in the mission which had brought him here.

Conversely, the more he thought of Edna, the more he desired her company. The more he thought of the uncouth Carl, the more he desired a chance to engage him in combat again, to beak-whip him until his pinfeathers came loose.

In a highly bellicose state of mind, Professor Alexander Peabody waddled down the muddy streets of Rome, ruffling his feathers.

But he could not find Carl and Ednat, and night had come on. He began to be hungry. Scarce through food was, he found a crust dropped beside a doorway, and his hard break broke it up into crumbs. He swallowed them with relish, washing them down with water from a puddle cleaner than most, and felt refreshed.

Now, however, in the darkness he was quite lost. The town had gone to bed shortly after nightfall. Occasionally a cloaked figure, sword at his side, shield slung over his back, passed. Sentries these seemed to be, for Professor Peabody saw them take up places at the walls.

But as the night wore on, and the raw wind grew keener, he perceived the sentries leaving their exposed positions and seeking protected niches where they might keep warm. Peabody, however, was scantly interested in them. A wan moon was rising, casting a faint radiance over the town; and down the street he could now see the temple outside which he had parted from Carl and Edna.

He hastened toward it.

And there they were, crouched cosily side by side in a corner, behind a fluted column, sleeping with their wings touching companionably.

Vast indignation and masculine jealousy made Professor Peabody emit a hiss of rage that brought the sleeping two to startled wakefulness. Then Edna blinked coyly.

"Why, it's Alex!" she said in dulcet tones.

"Listen, you bag of feathers," Carl clacked. "Beat it, or I'll pull you wing from wing and spit on the pieces."

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"You and who else?" Peabody retorted, remembering in time a favorite answer of youth to such challenges. "You pusillanimous fowl, I'll beat you down into goose grease!"

"Oh, Alex!" Edna sighed rapturously. "What lovely language you use. And how handsome you are when you're angry!"

"Take a last look at him then, bright-eyes," Carl told her, in vicious rage. "Because when I finish with him, he won't have enough feathers left to cover a sparrow."

And he rushed to the attack.

Professor Peabody gave way at first, mainly because he wanted the combat to take place on a different field of honor—the flat surface beyond the temple. The marble of Minerva's temple was slippery, and he wanted firm footing for this chivalric joust in which he was engaged.

So he scurried backwards and down the far steps, into the vacant lot where the rising moon gave a clear if subdued light. Carl pursued, hissing in triumph, and the sound of battle brought scores of sleepy geese running after them from the corners of the temple.

In the middle of the open space, Professor Peabody took his stand. He stopped running and began to attack.

The change in tactics took Carl by surprise, and while he was trying to recover himself, Professor Peabody got in half a dozen sound smacking beak-blows to the head. Then Carl screamed in redoubled rage and closed with him.

The other geese gathered about to watch, hissing in shrill excitement. Above all the voices, though, Edna's reached him most clearly, and her, "Oh, Alex, don't let him hurt you!" was sweet music to Professor Peabody's ears.

Professor Peabody, however, for all his valor, was unversed in the best fighting strategy of the fowl world, and was slowly getting the worst of the terrific wing-to-wing, beak-to-beak tussle, when an interruption occurred. A torch flared nearby, and a voice which he recognized roared in terrible rage.

"By the sacred bones of my ancestors, I'll slice the gizzard from the goose with the black marking on its throat, Minerva or no Minerva! Today on the Forum steps it made my ears ache with its hissing, and tonight it must engage in battle and make the air hideous with noise, waking honest Romans from their needful sleep. I'll toast its liver and grill its gizzard and stew its bones and—"

Another voice, raised in shrill excitement, cut the first short.

"Marcus! Marcus Manlius! They come! The enemy come stealing up the hillside path!"

Then indeed did the night become sonorous with the sound of battle. Men rushed forth into the street, buckling on shields and short swords. Torches flared

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bright. From the city wall came the shrill ululation of barbaric war cries, the gasp and scream of wounded men.

But Alexander Peabody heeded it not. He had his own fight to attend to. Carl was still strong and fresh, and pressing him back. So Peabody, in desperation, altered his tactics.

His new fighting method was a combination of all he could recall of the best features of chivalric jousting by knights with lances, and modern pursuit-plane dogfighting. Extending his neck like a spear, he rushed into Carl. His hard beak bored through Carl's defences and bowled him over. Following up his advantage, Professor Peabody took to the air.

With a great flapping of wings, he gained an altitude of three feet, and from there dive-bombed Carl. Carl, struggling up, received all of Peabody's weight on the side of his head and went down again, stunned. Alexander Peabody, withdrawing a yard or so, rushed in once more with the leveled spear technique.

Carl was flustered and dismayed. He gave ground. Professor Peabody pursued. Carl turned and ran for it, and Peabody delivered one last triumphant blow in the region of the tail-feathers. Then Carl's agonized squawks were receding down the street into the night, and Edna was snuggling up to Alexander Peabody as he leaned against the temple steps, panting for breath.

"Alex," Edna said, "you were *wonderful.*" And gently, adoringly, she rubbed her long, lissome white neck against his.

A strange thrill warmed Professor Peabody's blood. He had conquered an enemy in combat, and he had won the admiration of a fair lady.

"It wasn't anything really, Edna," he said modestly. "That Carl, he's just an over-rated bully."

"It *was* something," Edna breathed, snuggling closer to him and caressing him with her downy neck. "You're a hero, Alex. Anyway, you're *my* hero."

"It was for you I did it," Alexander Peabody said boldly, and only some tiny part of his personality was amazed, so thoroughly was his ego becoming integrated with the body it occupied. "For you. And I'll always fight for you if—if you'll let me."

"Oh, Alex!" Edna sighed blissfully, and pressed close against him.

They were alone, the other geese having gone back to sleep. And in his absorption, Professor Peabody was quite deaf to the diminishing sound of fighting at the city's walls. It was not until some time later when the light of torches came toward them, making him blink, that he remembered the Romans at all.

Then, as he looked up, a burly

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figure clad in skins leaped forth from the midst of a band of Roman soldiers, and snatching a sword from one, rushed at Professor Peabody.

"We'd have had you, cursed Romans!" a bull voice roared in bad Latin, "had it not been for this goose hatched of Satan! I saw him myself, as we were about to charge over the wall, fighting with another to awaken you. And he shall die for it!"

Edna screamed in fright as the huge fighting man, on his head a helmet from which horns curled upward, came at them, sword swinging. But Alexander Peabody felt no fear. He had sworn to protect her, and protect her he would. He launched himself forward, wings beating, beak extended, hissing ferociously. He leaped, and struck for the eyes as the glittering blade descended.

One ferocious jab he got in, while behind him Edna's anguished voice cried, *"Alex! Alex!"* Then the edge of the sword met his neck, and Professor Alexander Peabody knew only darkness.

The blackness may have lasted for a minute or an hour. Peabody could not tell. But as it lifted slowly, he heard Edna crying still, "Alex! Alex!" and shaking him by the wing with her beak. Professor Peabody opened his eyes.

"It's all right, Edna," he said. "I'm all right. I—"

Then he stopped, for it was his sister Martha he was staring at.

She stepped back, letting go his shoulder, and Alexander Peabody saw that he was in his Morris chair, in his study, and that it was night outside. The sheet of intricate equations which he had held in his hand to concentrate upon, many hours before, had vanished.

"Alexander!" Martha exclaimed. "What's been going on? I came in and you were sitting here in a trance, staring at a piece of paper in your hand. I—I couldn't even hear you breathing. You wouldn't wake up—not until I tore the piece of paper out of your hand and burned it! Now you—you're different, somehow. Who is Edna? What happened?"

Alexander Peabody did not answer her at once. He rose from his chair and from the bookcase drew a volume of the encyclopedia. And there he found the page he sought. For a minute he studied the words:

> MARCUS MANLIUS CAPITOLINUS. A patrician. Roman Consul 392 B.C. According to tradition, when in 390 B.C. the besieging Gauls were attempting to scale the Capitol, he was roused by the cackling of the sacred geese, rushed to the spot, and threw down the foremost assailants.

Slowly Peabody closed the volume and looked up.

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"I *am* changed," he stated. "I have known adventure. I have routed an enemy in single-handed combat. And I have affected the course of history.

"I am responsible for the fact that the Gauls did not capture Rome in 390 B.C. If Rome had fallen, then the Roman Empire might never have been. If the Roman Empire had not been, the history of the world would have been vastly different. I, Alexander Peabody, have affected history more than any Hitler, any Stalin, any other such can ever hope to. And I am satisfied."

Martha goggled at him. Then she sniffed.

"You've had a dream, I see," she commented. "But don't try to tell me you believe the dream really happened. Please don't be a goose!"

Before, Professor Alexander Peabody would have been annoyed at his sister's words. Now, as she flounced out of the room, they only made him smile reminiscently. For, after all, there was one fact of vast importance, a fact which Martha was overlooking....

Murchison Morks fell silent, looking into his almost empty glass. It was Walters who challenged him.

"And just what," he demanded, "was this so-called fact of vast importance that made such a big difference to your friend?"

Morks smiled gently. "Why," he said, "the perfectly obvious fact that Alexander Peabody was not, and could never have been, a goose. He was, of course, a gander. And there's a world of difference between a goose and a gander, as he discovered."

Murchison Morks raised his glass. "*Vive la difference!*" he toasted, and downed what remained of his drink.

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Philip Jose Farmer is perhaps best known to F&SF readers for his stories about Father John Carmody, the latest of which was "The Night of Light (F&SF, June, 1957). But Mr. Farmer has also long been distinctive for his ability to handle earthier themes, with a sure touch and a frank insight which are his alone. Here is such a story—as brutal, as blunt, and yet as poetic, as any of its kind that we have published.

THE ALLEY MAN

by Philip José Farmer

"THE MAN FROM THE PUZZLE FACtory was here this mornin," said Gummy. "While you was out fishin."

She dropped the piece of wiremesh she was trying to tie with string over a hole in the rusty window screen. Cursing, grunting like a hog in a wallow, she leaned over and picked it up. Straightening, she slapped viciously at her bare shoulder.

"Figurin skeeters! Must be a million outside, all tryin to get away from the burnin garbage."

"Puzzle factory?" said Deena. She turned away from the battered kerosene-burning stove over which she was frying sliced potatoes, and perch and bullheads caught in the Illinois River, half a mile away.

"Yeah!" snarled Gummy. "You heard Old Man say it. Nuthouse. Booby hatch. So . . . this cat from the puzzle factory was named John Elkins. He gave Old Man all those tests when they had im locked up last year. He's the skinny little guy with a moustache 'n never lookin you in the eye 'n grinnin like a skunk eatin a shirt. The cat who took Old Man's hat away from him 'n wun't give it back to him until Old Man promised to be good. Remember now?"

Deena, tall, skinny, clad only in a white terrycloth bathrobe, looked like a surprised and severed head stuck on a pike. The great purple birthmark on her cheek and neck stood out hideously against her paling skin.

"Are they going to send him back to the State hospital?" she asked, breathlessly.

Gummy, looking at herself in the cracked full-length mirror

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nailed to the wall, laughed and showed her two teeth. Her frizzy hair was a yellow brown, chopped short. Her little blue eyes were set far back in the tunnels beneath two protruding ridges of bone; her nose was very long, enormously wide, and tipped with a brokenveined bulb. Her chin was not there, and her head bent forward in a permanent crook. She was dressed only in a dirty once-white slip that came to her swollen knees. When she laughed, her huge breasts, resting on her distended belly, quivered like bowls of fermented cream. From her expression, it was evident that she was not displeased with what she saw in the broken glass.

Again she laughed. "Naw, they din't come to haul him away. Elkins just wanted to interduce this chick he had with him. A cute little brunette with big brown eyes behint real thick glasses. She looked just like a collidge girl, 'n she was. This chick has got a B.M. or something in sexology . . ."

"Psychology?"

"Maybe it was society-ology . . ."

"Sociology?"

"Umm. Maybe. Anyway, this foureyed chick is doin a study for a foundation. She wants to ride aroun with Old Man, see how he collects his junk, what alleys he goes up 'n down, what his, uh, habit patterns is, 'n learn what kinda bringing up he had . . ."

"Old Man'd never do it!" burst out Deena. "You know he can't stand the idea of being watched by a False Folker!"

"Umm. Maybe. Anyway, I tell em Old Man's not goin to like their slummin on him, 'n they say quick they're not slummin, it's for science. 'N they'll pay him for his trouble. They got a grant from the foundation. So I say maybe that'd make Old Man take another look at the color of the beer, 'n they left the house . . ."

"You *allowed* them in the house? Did you hide the birdcage?"

"Why hide it? His hat wasn't in it."

Deena turned back to frying her fish, but over her shoulder she said, "I don't think Old Man'll agree to the idea, do you? It's rather degrading."

"You *kiddin*? Who's lower'n Old Man? A snake's belly, maybe. Sure, he'll agree. He'll have a eye for the foureyed chick, sure."

"Don't be absurd," said Deena. "He's a dirty stinking one-armed middle-aged man, the ugliest man in the world."

"Yeah, it's the uglies he's got, for sure. 'N he smells like a goat that fell in a outhouse. But it's the smell that gets em. It got me, it got you, it got a whole stewpotfull a others, includin that high society dame he used to collect junk off of . . ."

"Shut up!" spat Deena. "This girl must be a highly refined and

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intelligent girl. She'd regard Old Man as some sort of ape."

"You know them apes," said Gummy, and she went to the ancient refrigerator and took out a cold quart of beer.

Six quarts of beer later, Old Man had still not come home. The fish had grown cold and greasy, and the big July moon had risen. Deena, like a long lean dirty-white nervous alley cat on top of a backyard fence, patrolled back and forth across the shanty. Gummy sat on the bench made of crates and hunched over her bottle. Finally, she lurched to her feet and turned on the battered set. But, hearing a rattling and pounding of a loose motor in the distance, she turned it off.

The banging and popping became a roar just outside the door. Abruptly, there was a mighty wheeze, like an old rusty robot coughing with double pneumonia in its iron lungs. Then, silence.

But not for long. As the two women stood paralyzed, listening apprehensively, they heard a voice like the rumble of distant thunder.

"Take it easy, kid."

Another voice, soft, drowsy, mumbling.

"Where . . . we?"

The voice like thunder, "Home, sweet home, where we rest our dome."

Violent coughing.

"It's this smoke from the burnin' garbage, kid. Enough to make a maggot puke, ain't it? Lookit! The smoke's risin t'wards the full moon like the ghosts a men so rotten even their spirits're carryin the contamination with em. Hey, li'l chick, you din't know Old Man knew them big words like contamination, didja? That's what livin on the city dump does for you. I hear that word all a time from the big shots that come down inspectin the stink here so they kin get away from the stink a City Hall. I ain't no illiterate. I got a TV set. Hor, hor, hor!"

There was a pause, and the two women knew he was bending his knees and tilting his torso backwards so he could look up at the sky.

"Ah, you lovely lovely moon, bride a The Old Guy In The Sky! Some day to come, rum-a-dum-a dum, one day I swear it, Old Woman a The Old Guy In the Sky, if you help me find the long-lost headpiece a King Paley that I and my fathers been lookin' for for fifty thousand years, so help me, Old Man Paley'll spread the freshly spilled blood a a virgin a the False Folkers out across the ground for you, so you kin lay down in it like a red carpet or a new red dress and wrap it aroun you. And then you won't have to crinkle up your lovely shinin nose at me and spit your silver spit on me. Old Man promises that, just as sure as his good arm is holdin a

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daughter a one a the Falsers, a virgin, I think, and bringin her to his home, however humble it be, so we shall see . . ."

"Stoned out a his head," whispered Gummy.

"My God, he's bringing a girl in here!" said Denna. "*The* girl!"

"Not the *collidge* kid?"

"Does the idiot want to get lynched?"

The man outside bellowed, "Hey, you wimmen, get off your fat asses and open the door 'fore I kick it in! Old Man's home with a fistfull a dollars, a armfull a sleepin lamb, and a gutfull a beer! Home like a conquerin hero and wants service like one, too!"

Suddenly unfreezing, Deena opened the door.

Out of the darkness and into the light shuffled something so squat and blocky it seemed more a tree trunk come to life than a man. It stopped, and the eyes under the huge black homburg hat blinked glazedly. Even the big hat could not hide the peculiar lengthened-out breadloaf shape of the skull. The forehead was abnormally low; over the eyes were bulging arches of bone. These were tufted with eyebrows like Spanish moss that made even more cavelike the hollows in which the little blue eyes lurked. Its nose was very long and very wide and flaring-nostrilled. The lips were thin but pushed out by the shoving jaws beneath them. Its chin was absent, and head and shoulders joined almost without intervention from a neck, or so it seemed. A corkscrew forest of rusty-red hairs sprouted from its open shirt front.

Over his shoulder, held by a hand wide and knobbly as a coral branch, hung the slight figure of a young woman.

He shuffled into the room in an odd bent-kneed gait, walking on the sides of his thick-soled engineer's boots. Suddenly, he stopped again, sniffed deeply, and smiled, exposing teeth thick and yellow, dedicated to biting.

"Jeez, that smells good. It takes the old garbage stink right off. Gummy! You been sprinklin yourself with that perfume I found in a ash heap up on the bluffs?"

Gummy, giggling, looked coy.

Deena said, sharply, "Don't be a fool, Gummy. He's trying to butter you up so you'll forget he's bringing this girl home."

Old Man Paley laughed hoarsely and lowered the snoring girl upon an Army cot. There she sprawled out with her skirt around her hips. Gummy cackled, but Deena hurried to pull the skirt down and also to remove the girl's thick shellrimmed glasses.

"Lord," she said, "how did this happen? What'd you do to her?"

"Nothin," he growled, suddenly sullen.

He took a quart of beer from the refrigerator, bit down on the

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cap with teeth thick and chipped as ancient gravestones, and tore it off. Up went the bottle, forward went his knees, back went his torso as he leaned away from the bottle, and down went the amber liquid, gurgle, gurgle, glub. He belched, then roared. "There I was, Old Man Paley, mindin my own figurin business, packin a bunch a papers and magazines I found, and here comes a blue 51 Ford sedan with Elkins, the doctor jerk from the puzzle factory. And this little foureyed chick here, Dorothy Singer. And . . ."

"Yes," said Deena. "We know who they are, but we didn't know they went after you."

"Who asked you? Who's tellin this story? Anyway, they tole me what they wanted. And I was gonna say no, but this little collidge broad says if I'll sign a paper that'll agree to let her travel around with me and even stay in our house a couple a evenins, with us actin natural, she'll pay me fifty dollars. I says yes! Old Guy In The Sky! That's a hundred and fifty quarts a beer! I got principles, but they're washed away in a roarin foamin flood of beer.

"I says yes, and the cute little runt give me the paper to sign, then advances me ten bucks and says I'll get the rest seven days from now. Ten dollars in my pocket! So she climbs up into the seat a my truck. And then this figurin Elkins parks his Ford and says he thinks he ought a go with us to check on if everything's gonna be O.K.

"He's not foolin Old Man. He's after Little Miss Foureyes. Everytime he looks at her, the lovejuice runs out a his eyes. So, I collect junk for a couple a hours, talkin all the time. And she is scared a me at first because I'm so figurin ugly and strange. But after a while she busts out laughin. Then I pulls the truck up in the alley back a Jack's Tavern on Ames Street. She asks me what I'm doin. I says I'm stoppin for a beer, just as I do every day. And she says she could stand one, too. So . . ."

"You actually went inside with her?" asked Deena.

"Naw. I was gonna try, but I started gettin the shakes. And I hadda tell her I coun't do it. She asks me why. I say I don't know. Ever since I quit bein a kid, I kin't. So she says I got a . . . something like a fresh flower, what is it?"

"Neurosis?" said Deena.

"Yeah. Only I call it a taboo. So Elkins and the little broad go into Jack's and get a cold six-pack, and bring it out, and we're off . . ."

"So?"

"So we go from place to place, though always stayin in alleys, and she thinks it's funnier'n hell gettin loaded in the backs a taverns. Then I get to seein double and don't care no more and I'm over my fraidies, so we go into

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the Circle Bar. And get in a fight there with one a the hillbillies in his sideburns and leather jacket that hangs out there and tries to take the foureyed chick home with him."

Both the women gasped, "Did the cops come?"

"If they did, they was late to the party. I grab this hillbilly by his leather jacket with my one arm—the strongest arm in this world—and throw him clean acrosst the room. And when his buddies come after me, I pound my chest like a figurin gorilla and make a figurin face at em, and they all of a sudden get their shirts up their necks and go back to listenin to their hillbilly music. And I pick up the chick—she's laughin so hard she's chokin—and Elkins, white as a sheet out a the laundromat, after me, and away we go, and here we are."

"Yes, you fool, here you are!" shouted Deena. "Bringing that girl here in that condition! She'll start screaming her head off when she wakes up and sees you!"

"Go figure yourself!" snorted Paley. "She was scared a me at first, and she tried to stay upwind a me. But she got to *likin* me. I could tell. And she got so she liked my smell, too. I knew she would. Don't all the broads? These False wimmen kin't say no once they get a whiff a us. Us Paleys got the gift in the blood."

Deena laughed and said, "You mean you have it in the head. Honest to God, when are you going to quit trying to forcefeed me with that bull? You're insane!"

Paley growled. "I tole you not never to call me nuts, not never!" and he slapped her across the cheek.

She reeled back and slumped against the wall, holding her face and crying, "You ugly stupid stinking ape, you hit me, the daughter of people whose boots you aren't fit to lick! *You* struck *me!*"

"Yeah, and ain't you glad I did," said Paley in tones like a complacent earthquake. He shuffled over to the cot and put his hand on the sleeping girl.

"Uh, feel that. No sag there, you two flabs."

"You beast!" screamed Deena. "Taking advantage of a helpless little girl!"

Like an alley cat, she leaped at him with claws out.

Laughing hoarsely, he grabbed one of her wrists and twisted it so she was forced to her knees and had to clench her teeth to keep from screaming with pain. Gummy cackled and handed Old Man a quart of beer. To take it, he had to free Deena. She rose, and all three, as if nothing had happened, sat down at the table and began drinking.

About dawn a deep animal snarl awoke the girl. She opened

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her eyes but could make out the trio only dimly and distortedly. Her hands, groping around for her glasses, failed to find them.

Old Man, whose snarl had shaken her from the high tree of sleep, growled again. "I'm telling you, Deena, I'm telling you, don't laugh at Old Man, don't laugh at Old Man, and I'm telling you again, three times, don't laugh at Old Man!"

His incredible bass rose to a high-pitched scream of rage.

"Whassa matta wi your figurin brain? I show you proof after proof, 'n you sit there in all your stupidity like a silly hen that sits down too hard on its eggs and breaks em but won't get up 'n admit she's squattin on a mess. I—I—Paley—Old Man Paley—kin prove I'm what I say I am, a Real Folker."

Suddenly, he propelled his hand across the table towards Deena.

"Feel them bones in my lower arm! Them two bones ain't straight and dainty like the arm bones a you False Folkers. They're thick as flagpoles, and they're curved out from each other like the backs a two tomcats outbluffing each other over a fishhead on a garbage can. They're built that way so's they kin be real strong anchors for my muscles, which is bigger'n False Folkers'. Go ahead, feel em.

"And look at them brow ridges. Like the tops a those shell-rimmed spectacles all them intellekchooalls wear. Like the spectacles this collidge chick wears.

"And feel the shape a my skull. It ain't a ball like yours but a loaf a bread."

"Fossilized bread!" sneered Deena. "Hard as a rock, through and through."

Old Man roared on, "Feel my neck bones if you got the strength to feel through my muscles! They-'re bent forward, not—"

"Oh, I know you're an ape. You can't look overhead to see if that was a bird or just a drop of rain without breaking your back."

"Ape, hell! I'm a Real Man! Feel my heel bone! Is it like yours? No, it ain't! It's built different, and so's my whole foot!"

"Is that why you and Gummy and all those brats of yours have to walk like chimpanzees?"

"Laugh, laugh, laugh!"

"I am laughing, laughing, laughing. Just because you're a freak of nature, a monstrosity whose bones all went wrong in the womb, you've dreamed up this fantastic myth about being descended from the Neanderthals . . ."

"Neanderthals!" whispered Dorothy Singer. The walls whirled about her, looking twisted and ghostly in the half-light, like a room in Limbo.

". . . all this stuff about the lost hat of Old King," continued Deena, "and how if you ever find

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it you can break the spell that keeps you so-called Neanderthals on the dumpheaps and in the alleys, is garbage, and not very appetizing . . ."

"And you," shouted Paley, "are headin for a beatin!"

"Thass wha she wants," mumbled Gummy. "Go ahead. Beat her. She'll get her jollies off, 'n quit needlin you. 'N we kin all git some shuteye. Besides, you're gonna wake up the chick."

"That chick is gonna get a wakin up like she never had before when Old Man gits his paws on her," rumbled Paley. "Guy In The Sky, ain't it somethin she should a met me and be in this house? Sure as an old shirt stinks, she ain't gonna be able to tear herself away from me.

"Hey, Gummy, maybe she'll have a kid for me, huh? We ain't had a brat around here for ten years. I kinda miss my kids. You gave me six that was Real Folkers, though I never was sure about that Jimmy, he looked too much like O'Brien. Now you're all dried up, dry as Deena always was, but you kin still raise em. How'd you like to raise the collidge chick's kid?"

Gummy grunted and swallowed beer from a chipped coffee mug. After belching loudly, she mumbled, "Don know. You're crazier'n even I think you are if you think this cute little Miss Foureyes'd have anything to do wi you. 'N even if she was out a her head nough to do it, what kind a life is this for a brat? Get raised in a dump? Have a ugly old maw 'n paw? Grow up so ugly nobody'd have nothin to do wi him 'n smellin so strange all the dogs'd bite him?"

Suddenly, she began blubbering.

"It ain't only Neanderthals has to live on dumpheaps. It's the crippled 'n the sick 'n the stupid 'n the queer in the head that has to live here. 'N they become Neanderthals just as much as us Real Folk. No diff'rence, no diff'rence. We're all ugly 'n hopeless 'n rotten. We're all Neander . . ."

Old Man's fist slammed the table.

"Name me no names like that! That's a *G'Yaga* name for us Paleys —Real Folkers. Don't let me never hear that other name again! It don't mean a man; it means somethin like a high-class gorilla."

"Quit lookin in the mirror!" shrieked Deena.

There was more squabbling and jeering and roaring and confusing and terrifying talk, but Dorothy Singer had closed her eyes and fallen asleep again.

Some time later, she awoke. She sat up, found her glasses on a little table beside her, put them on, and stared about her.

She was in a large shack built of odds and ends of wood. It had

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two rooms, each about ten feet square. In the corner of one room was a large kerosene-burning stove. Bacon was cooking in a huge skillet; the heat from the stove made sweat run from her forehead and over her glasses.

After drying them off with her handkerchief, she examined the furnishings of the shack. Most of it was what she had expected, but three things surprised her. The bookcase, the photograph on the wall, and the birdcage.

The bookcase was tall and narrow and of some dark wood, badly scratched. It was crammed with comic books, Blue Books, and Argosies, some of which she supposed must be at least twenty years old. There were a few books whose ripped backs and water-stained covers indicated they'd been picked out of ash heaps. Haggard's *Allan And The Ice Gods*, Wells's *Outline Of History*, Vol. I, and his *The Croquet Player*. Also *Gog And Magog, A Prophecy Of Armageddon* by the Reverend Caleb G. Harris. Burroughs' *Tarzan The Terrible* and *In The Earth's Core*. Jack London's *Beyond Adam*.

The framed photo on the wall was that of a woman who looked much like Deena and must have been taken around 1890. It was very large, tinted in brown, and showed an aristocratic handsome woman of about thirty-five in a highbusted velvet dress with a high neckline. Her hair was drawn severely back to a knot on top of her head. A diadem of jewels was on her breast.

The strangest thing was the large parrot cage. It stood upon a tall support which had nails driven through its base to hold it to the floor. The cage itself was empty, but the door was locked with a long narrow bicycle lock.

Her speculation about it was interrupted by the two women calling to her from their place by the stove.

Deena said, "Good morning, Miss Singer. How do you feel?"

"Some Indian buried his hatchet in my head," Dorothy said. "And my tongue is molting. Could I have a drink of water, please?"

Deena took a pitcher of cold water out of the refrigerator, and from it filled up a tin cup.

"We don't have any running water. We have to get our water from the gas station down the road and bring it here in a bucket."

Dorothy looked dubious, but she closed her eyes and drank.

"I think I'm going to get sick," she said. "I'm sorry."

"I'll take you to the outhouse," said Deena, putting her arm around the girl's shoulder and heaving her up with surprising strength.

"Once I'm outside," said Dorothy faintly, "I'll be all right."

"Oh, I know," said Deena. "It's

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the odor. The fish, Gummy's cheap perfume, Old Man's sweat, the beer. I forgot how it first affected me. But it's no better outside."

Dorothy didn't reply, but when she stepped through the door, she murmured, "Ohh!"

"Yes, I know," said Deena. "It's awful, but it won't kill you . . ."

Ten minutes later, Deena and a pale and weak Dorothy came out of the ramshackle outhouse.

They returned to the shanty, and for the first time Dorothy noticed that Elkins was sprawled face up on the seat of the truck. His head hung over the end of the seat, and the flies buzzed around his open mouth.

"This is horrible," said Deena. "He'll be very angry when he wakes up and finds out where he is. He's such a respectable man."

"Let the heel sleep it off," said Dorothy. She walked into the shanty, and a moment later Paley clomped into the room, a smell of stale beer and very peculiar sweat advancing before him in a wave.

"How you feel?" he growled in a timbre so low the hairs on the back of her neck rose.

"Sick. I think I'll go home."

"Sure. Only try some a the hair."

He handed her a half-empty pint of whiskey. Dorothy reluctantly downed a large shot chased with cold water. After a brief revulsion, she began feeling better and took another shot. She then washed her face in a bowl of water and drank a third whiskey.

"I think I can go with you now," she said. "But I don't care for breakfast."

"I ate already," he said. "Let's go. It's ten-thirty according to the clock on the gas station. My alleys prob'ly been cleaned out by now. Them other ragpickers are always moochin in on my territory when they think I'm stayin home. But you kin bet they're scared out a their pants every time they see a shadow cause they're afraid it's Old Man and he'll catch em and squeeze their guts out and crack their ribs with this one good arm."

Laughing a laugh so hoarse and unhuman it seemed to come from some troll deep in the caverns of his bowels, he opened the refrigerator and took another beer.

"I need another to get me started, not to mention what I'll have to give that damn balky bitch, Fordiana."

As they stepped outside, they saw Elkins stumble towards the outhouse and then fall headlong through the open doorway. He lay motionless on the floor, his feet sticking out of the entrance. Alarmed, Dorothy wanted to go after him, but Paley shook his head.

"He's a big boy; he kin take care a hisself. We got to git Fordiana up and goin."

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Fordiana was the battered and rusty pick-up truck. It was parked outside Paley's bedroom window so he could look out any time of the night and make sure no one was stealing parts or even the whole truck.

"Not that I ought a worry about her," grumbled Old Man. He drank three-fourths of the quart in four mighty gulps, then uncapped the truck's radiator and poured the rest of the beer down it.

"She knows nobody else'll give her beer, so I think that if any a these robbin figurers that live on the dump or at the shacks around the bend was to try to steal anything off'n her, she'd honk and backfire and throw rods and oil all over the place so's her Old Man could wake up and punch the figurin shirt off a the thievin figurer. But maybe not. She's a female. And you can't trust a figurin female."

He poured the last drop down the radiator and roared, "There! Now don't you dare *not* turn over. You're robbin me a the good beer I could be havin! If you so much as backfire, Old Man'll beat hell out a you with a sledge hammer!"

Wide-eyed but silent, Dorothy climbed onto the ripped open front seat beside Paley. The starter whirred, and the motor sputtered.

"No more beer if you don't work!" shouted Paley.

There was a bang, a fizz, a sput, a *whop, whop, whop,* a clash of gears, a monstrous and triumphant showing of teeth by Old Man, and they were bumpbumping over the rough ruts.

"Old Man knows how to handle all them bitches, flesh or tin, two-legged, fourlegged, wheeled. I sweat beer and passion and promise em a kick in the tailpipe if they don't behave, and that gets em all. I'm so figurin ugly I turn their stomachs. But once they git a whiff a the out-a-this-world stink a me, they're done for, they fall prostrooted at my big hairy feet. That's the way it's always been with us Paley men and the *G'yaga* wimmen. That's why their menfolks fear us, and why we got into so much trouble."

Dorothy did not say anything, and Paley fell silent as soon as the truck swung off the dump and onto U. S. Route 24. He seemed to fold up into himself, to be trying to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. During the three minutes it took the truck to get from the shanty to the city limits, he kept wiping his sweating palm against his blue workman's shirt.

But he did not try to release the tension with oaths. Instead, he muttered a string of what seemed to Dorothy nonsense rhymes.

"Eenie, meenie, minie, moe. Be a good Guy, help me go. Hoola boola, teenie weenie, ram em,

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damn em, figure em, duck em, watch me go, don't be a shmoe. Stop em, block em, sing a go go go."

Not until they had gone a mile into the city of Onaback and turned from 24 into an alley did he relax.

"Whew! That's torture, and I been doin it ever since I was sixteen, some years ago. Today seems worse'n ever, maybe cause you're along. *G'yaga* men don't like it if they see me with one a their wimmen, specially a cute chick like you.

Suddenly, he smiled and broke into a song about being covered all over "with sweet violets, sweeter than all the roses." He sang other songs, some of which made Dorothy turn red in the face though at the same time she giggled. When they crossed a street to get from one alley to another, he cut off his singing, even in the middle of a phrase, and resumed it on the other side.

Reaching the west bluff, he slowed the truck to a crawl while his little blue eyes searched the ash heaps and garbage cans at the rears of the houses. Presently, he stopped the truck and climbed down to inspect his find.

"Guy In The Sky, we're off to a flyin start! Look!—some old grates from a coal furnace. And a pile a coke and beer bottles, all redeemable. Get down, Dor'thy—if you want a know how us ragpickers make a livin, you gotta get in and sweat and cuss with us. And if you come across any hats, be sure to tell me."

Dorothy smiled. But when she stepped down from the truck, she winced.

"What's the matter?"

"Headache."

"The sun'll boil it out. Here's how we do this collectin, see? The back end a the truck is boarded up into five sections. This section here is for the iron and the wood. This, for the paper. This, for the cardboard. You get a higher price for the cardboard. This, for rags. This, for bottles we can get a refund on. If you find any int'restin books or magazines, put em on the seat. I'll decide if I want to keep em or throw em in with the old paper."

They worked swiftly, and then drove on. About a block later, they were interrupted at another heap by a leaf of a woman, withered and blown by the winds of time. She hobbled out from the back porch of a large three-storied house with diamond-shaped panes in the windows and doors and cupolas at the corners. In a quavering voice she explained that she was the widow of a wealthy lawyer who had died fifteen years ago. Not until today had she made up her mind to get rid of his collection of law books and legal papers. These were all neatly cased in cardboard boxes not too large to be handled.

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Not even, she added, her pale watery eyes flickering from Paley to Dorothy, not even by a poor one-armed man and a young girl.

Old Man took off his homburg and bowed.

"Sure, ma'am, my daughter and myself'd be glad to help you out in your housecleanin."

"Your daughter?" croaked the old woman.

"She don't look like me a tall," he replied. "No wonder. She's my fosterdaughter. Poor girl, she was orphaned when she was still fillin her diapers. My best friend was her father. He died savin my life, and as he laid gaspin his life away in my arms, he begged me to take care a her as if she was my own. And I kept my promise to my dyin friend, may his soul rest in peace. And even if I'm only a poor ragpicker, ma'am, I been doin my best to raise her to be a decent Godfearin obedient girl."

Dorothy had to run around to the other side of the truck where she could cover her mouth and writhe in an agony of attempting to smother her laughter. When she regained control, the old lady was telling Paley she'd show him where the books were. Then she started hobbling to the porch.

But Old Man, instead of following her across the yard, stopped by the fence that separated the alley from the backyard. He turned around and gave Dorothy a look of extreme despair.

"What's the matter?" she said. "Why're you sweating so? And shaking? And you're so pale."

"You'd laugh if I told you, and I don't like to be laughed at."

"Tell me. I won't laugh."

He closed his eyes and began muttering, "Never mind, it's in the mind. Never mind, you're just fine." Opening his eyes, he shook himself like a dog just come from the water.

"I kin do it. I got the guts. All them books're a lotta beer money I'll lose if I don't go down into the bowels a hell and get em. Guy In The Sky, give me the guts a a goat and the nerve a a pork dealer in Palestine. You know Old Man ain't got a yellow streak. It's the wicked spell a the False Folkers workin on me. Come on, let's go, go, go."

And sucking in a deep breath, he stepped through the gateway. Head down, eyes on the grass at his feet, he shuffled towards the cellar door where the old lady stood peering at him.

Four steps away from the cellar entrance, he halted again. A small black spaniel had darted from around the corner of the house and begun yapyapping at him.

Old Man suddenly cocked his head to one side, crossed his eyes, and deliberately sneezed.

Yelping, the spaniel fled back around the corner, and Paley walked down the steps that led to the cool dark basement. As he did

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so, he muttered, "That puts the evil spell on em figurin dogs."

When they had piled all the books in the back of the truck, he took off his homburg and bowed again.

"Ma'am, my daughter and myself both thank you from the rock-bottom a our poor but humble hearts for this treasure trove you give us. And if ever you've anythin else you don't want, and a strong back and a weak mind to carry it out . . . well, please remember we'll be down this alley every Blue Monday and Fish Friday about the time the sun is three-quarters acrosst the sky. Providin it ain't rainin cause the Old Guy In The Sky is cryin in his beer over us poor mortals, what fools we be."

Then he put his hat on, and the two got into the truck and chugged off. They stopped by several other promising heaps before he announced that the truck was loaded enough. He felt like celebrating; perhaps they should stop off behind Mike's Tavern and down a few quarts. She replied that perhaps she might manage a drink if she could have a whiskey. Beer wouldn't set well.

"I got some money," rumbled Old Man, unbuttoning with slow clumsy fingers his shirtpocket and pulling out a roll of worn tattered bills while the truck's wheels rolled straight in the alley ruts.

"You brought me luck, so Old Man's gonna pay today through the hose, I mean, nose, har, har, har!"

He stopped Fordiana behind a little neighborhood tavern. Dorothy, without being asked, took the two dollars he handed her and went into the building. She returned with a can opener, two quarts of beer, and a halfpint of V.O.

"I added some of my money. I can't stand cheap whiskey."

They sat on the running board of the truck, drinking, Old Man doing most of the talking. It wasn't long before he was telling her of the times when the Real Folk, the Paleys, had lived in Europe and Asia by the side of the wooly mammoths and the cave lion.

"We worshipped the Old Guy In The Sky who says what the thunder says and lives in the east on the tallest mountain in the world. We faced the skulls a our dead to the east so they could see the Old Guy when he came to take them to live with him in the mountain.

"And we was doin fine for a long long time. Then, out a the east come them motherworshippin False Folk with their long straight legs and long straight necks and flat faces and thundermug round heads and their bows and arrows. They claimed they was sons a the goddess Mother Earth, who was a virgin. But we

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claimed the truth was that a crow with stomach trouble sat on a stump and when it left the hot sun hatched em out.

"Well, for a while we beat them hands down because we was stronger. Even one a our wimmen could tear their strongest man to bits. Still, they had that bow and arrow, they kept pickin us off, and movin in and movin in, and we kept movin back slowly, till pretty soon we was shoved with our backs against the ocean.

"Then one day a big chief among us got a bright idea. 'Why don't we make bows and arrows, too?' he said. And so we did, but we was clumsy at makin and shootin em cause our hands was so big, though we could draw a heavier bow'n em. So we kept gettin run out a the good huntin grounds.

"There was one thing might a been in our favor. That was, we bowled the wimmin a the Falsers over with our smell. Not that we smell good. We stink like a pig that's been makin love to a billy goat on a manure pile. But, somehow, the wimmen folk a the Falsers was all mixed up in their chemistry, I guess you'd call it, cause they got all excited and developed roundheels when they caught a whiff a us. If we'd been left alone with em, we could a Don Juan'd them Falsers right off a the face a the earth. We would a mixed our blood with theirs so much that after a while you coun't tell the difference. Specially since the kids lean to their pa's side in looks, Paley blood is so much stronger.

"But that made sure there would always be war tween us. Specially after our king, Old King Paley, made love to the daughter a the Falser king, King Raw Boy, and stole her away.

"Gawd, you shou'd a seen the fuss then! Raw Boy's daughter flipped over Old King Paley. And it was her gave him the bright idea a callin in every able-bodied Paley that was left and organizin em into one big army. Kind a puttin all our eggs in one basket, but it seemed a good idea. Every man big enough to carry a club went out in one big mob on Operation False Folk Massacree. And we ganged up on every little town a them motherworshippers we found. And kicked hell out a em. And roasted the men's hearts and ate em. And every now and then took a snack off the wimmen and kids, too.

"Then, all of a sudden, we come to a big plain. And there's a army a them False Folk, collected by Old King Raw Boy. They outnumber us, but we feel we kin lick the world. Specially since the magic strength a the *G'yaga* lies in their wimmen folk, cause they worship a woman god, the Old Woman In The Earth. And we've got their chief priestess, Raw Boy's daughter.

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"All our own personal power is collected in Old King Paley's hat—his magical headpiece. All a us Paleys believed that a man's strength and his soul was in his headpiece.

"We bed down the night before the big battle. At dawn there's a cry that'd wake up the dead. It still sends shivers down the necks a us Paleys fifty thousand years later. It's King Paley roarin and cryin. We ask him why. He says that that dirty little sneakin little hoor, Raw Boy's daughter, has stole his headpiece and run off with it to her father's camp.

"Our knees turn weak as near-beer. Our manhood is in the hands a our enemies. But out we go to battle, our witch doctors out in front rattlin their gourds and whirlin their bullroarers and prayin. And here come the *G'yaga* medicine men doin the same. Only thing, their hearts is in their work cause they got Old King's headpiece stuck on the end a a spear.

"And for the first time they use dogs in war, too. Dogs never did like us any more'n we like em.

"And then we charge into each other. Bang! Wallop! Crash! Smash! Whack! Owwwrrroooo! And they kick hell out a us, do it to us. And we're never again the same, done forever. They had Old King's headpiece and with it our magic, cause we'd all put the soul a us Paleys in that hat.

"The spirit and power a us Paleys was prisoners cause that headpiece was. And life became too much for us Paleys. Them as wasn't slaughtered and eaten was glad to settle down on the garbage heaps a the conquerin Falsers and pick for a livin with the chickens, sometimes comin out second best.

"But we knew Old King's headpiece was hidden somewhere, and we organized a secret society and swore to keep alive his name and to search for the headpiece if it took us forever. Which it almost has, it's been so long.

"But even though we was doomed to live in shantytowns and stay off the streets and prowl the junkpiles in the alleys, we never gave up hope. And as time went on some a the no-counts a the *G'yaga* came down to live with us. And we and they had kids. Soon, most a us had disappeared into the bloodstream a the low class *G'yaga*. But there's always been a Paley family that tried to keep their blood pure. No man kin do no more, kin he?"

He glared at Dorothy. "What d'ya think a that?"

Weakly, she said, "Well, I've never heard anything like it."

"Gawdamighty!" snorted Old Man. "I give you a history longer'n a hoor's dream, more'n fifty thousand years a history, the secret story a a long lost race. And all you kin say is that you never heard nothin like it before."

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He leaned towards her and clamped his huge hand over her thigh.

"Don't flinch from me!" he said fiercely. "Or turn your head away. Sure, I stink, and I offend your dainty figurin nostrils and upset your figurin delicate little guts. But what's a minute's whiff a me on your part compared to a lifetime on my part a havin all the stinkin garbage in the universe shoved up my nose, and my mouth filled with what you woun't say if your mouth was full a it? What do your say to that, huh?"

Coolly, she said, "Please take your hand off of me."

"Sure, I din't mean nothin by it. I got carried away and forgot my place in society."

"Now, look here," she said earnestly: "That has nothing at all to do with your so-called social position. It's just that I don't allow anybody to take liberties with my body. Maybe I'm being ridiculously Victorian, but I want more than just sensuality. I want love, and—"

"O.K., I get the idea."

Dorothy stood up and said, "I'm only a block from my apartment. I think I'll walk on home. The liquor's given me a headache."

"Yeah," he growled. "You sure it's the liquor and not me?"

She looked steadily at him. "I'm going, but I'll see you tomorrow morning. Does that answer your question?"

"O.K.," he grunted. "See you. Maybe."

She walked away very fast.

Next morning, shortly after dawn, a sleepy-eyed Dorothy stopped her car before the Paley shanty. Deena was the only one home. Gummy had gone to the river to fish, and Old Man was in the outhouse. Dorothy took the opportunity to talk to Deena, and found her, as she had suspected, a woman of considerable education. However, although she was polite, she was reticent about her background. Dorothy, in an effort to keep the conversation going, mentioned that she had phoned her former anthropology professor and asked him about the chances of Old Man being a genuine Neanderthal. It was then that Deena broke her reserve and eagerly asked what the professor had thought.

"Well," said Dorothy, "he just laughed. He told me it was an absolute impossibility that a small group, even an inbred group isolated in the mountains, could have kept their cultural and genetic identity for fifty thousand years.

"I argued with him. I told him Old Man insisted he and his kind had existed in the village of Paley in the mountains of the Pyrenees until Napoleon's men found them and tried to draft them. Then they fled to America, after a stay in England. And his group was split

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up during the Civil War, driven out of the Great Smokies. He, as far as he knows, is the last pure-breed, Gummy being a half- or quarter-breed.

"The professor assured me that Gummy and Old Man were cases of glandular malfunctioning, of acromegaly. That they may have a superficial resemblance to the Neanderthal man, but a physical anthropologist could tell the difference at a glance. When I got a little angry and asked him if he wasn't taking an unscientific and prejudiced attitude, he became rather irritated. Our talk ended somewhat frostily.

"But I went down to the university library that night and read everything on what makes *Homo Neanderthalensis* different from *Homo Sapiens*."

"You almost sound as if you believe Old Man's private little myth is the truth," said Deena.

"The professor taught me to be convinced only by the facts and not to say anything is impossible," replied Dorothy. "If he's forgotten his own teachings, I haven't."

"Well, Old Man is a persuasive talker," said Deena. "He could sell the devil a harp and halo."

Just then Old Man, wearing only a pair of blue jeans, entered the shanty. For the first time Dorothy saw his naked chest, huge, covered with long redgold hairs so numerous they formed a matting almost as thick as an orang-utang's. However, it was not his chest but his bare feet at which she looked most intently. Yes, the big toes were widely separated from the others, and he certainly tended to walk on the outside of his feet.

His arm, too, seemed abnormally short in proportion to his body.

Old Man grunted a good morning and didn't say much for a while. But after he had sweated and cursed and chanted his way through the streets of Onaback and had arrived safely at the alleys of the west bluff, he relaxed. Perhaps he was helped by finding a large pile of papers and rags.

"Well, here we go to work, so don't you dare to shirk. Jump, Dor'thy! By the sweat a your brow, you'll earn your brew!"

When that load was on the truck, they drove off. Paley said, "How you like this life without no strife? Good, huh? You like alleys, huh?"

Dorothy nodded. "As a child, I liked alleys better than streets. And they still preserve for me something of their first charm. They were more fun to play in, so nice and cozy. The trees and bushes and fences leaned in at you and sometimes touched you as if they had hands and liked to feel your face to find out if you'd been there before, and they remembered you. You felt as if you were sharing a secret with the alleys and the things of the alleys. But

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streets, well, streets were always the same, and you had to watch out the cars didn't run over you, and the windows in the houses were full of faces and eyes, poking their noses into your business, if you can say that eyes had noses."

Old Man whooped and slapped his thigh so hard it would have broken it if it had been Dorothy's.

"You must be a Paley! We feel that way, too! We ain't allowed to hang around streets, so we make our alleys into little kingdoms. Tell me, do you sweat just crossin a street from one alley to the next?"

He put his hand on her knee. She looked down at it but said nothing about it, and he left it there while the truck putputted along, its wheels following the ruts of the alley.

"No, I don't feel that way at all."

"Yeah? Well, when you was a kid, you wasn't so ugly you hadda stay off the streets. But I still wasn't too happy in the alleys because a them figurin dogs. Forever and forever they was barkin and bitin at me. So I took to beatin the bejesus out a them with a big stick I always carried. But after a while I found out I only had to look at em in a certain way. Yi, yi, yi, they'd run away yapping, like that old black spaniel did yesterday. Why? Cause they knew I was sneezin evil spirits at em. It was then I began to know I wasn't human. A course, my old man had been tellin me that ever since I cou'd talk.

"As I grew up I felt every day that the spell a the *G'yaga* was gettin stronger. I was gettin dirtier and dirtier looks from em on the streets. And when I went down the alleys, I felt like I really *belonged* there. Finally, the day came when I coun't cross a street without gettin sweaty hands and cold feet and a dry mouth and breathin hard. That was cause I was becomin a full-grown Paley, and the curse a the *G'yaga* gets more powerful as you get more hair on your chest."

"Curse?" said Dorothy. "Some people call it a neurosis."

"It's a curse."

Dorothy didn't answer. Again, she looked down at her knee, and this time he removed his hand. He would have had to do it, anyway, for they had come to a paved street.

On the way down to the junk dealer's, he continued the same theme. And when they got to the shanty, he elaborated upon it.

During the thousands of years the Paley lived on the garbage piles of the *G'yaga,* they were closely watched. So, in the old days, it had been the custom for the priests and warriors of the False Folk to descend on the dumpheap dwellers whenever a strong and obstreperous Paley came to manhood. And they had gouged out an eye or cut off his

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hand or leg or some other member to ensure that he remembered what he was and where his place was.

"That's why I lost this arm," Old Man growled, waving the stump. "Fear a the *G'yaga* for the Paley did this to me."

Deena howled with laughter and said, "Dorothy, the truth is that he got drunk one night and passed out on the railroad tracks, and a freight train ran over his arm."

"Sure, sure, that's the way it was. But it coun't a happened if the Falsers din't work through their evil black magic. Nowadays, stead a cripplin us openly, they use spells. They ain't got the guts any more to do it themselves."

Deena laughed scornfully and said, "He got all those psychopathic ideas from reading those comics and weird tale magazines and those crackpot books and from watching that TV program, *Alley Oop And The Dinosaur*. I can point out every story from which he's stolen an idea."

"You're a liar!" thundered Old Man.

He struck Deena on the shoulder. She reeled away from the blow, then leaned back toward him as if into a strong wind. He struck her again, this time across her purple birthmark. Her eyes glowed, and she cursed him. And he hit her once more, hard enough to hurt but not to injure.

Dorothy opened her mouth as if to protest, but Gummy lay a fat sweaty hand on her shoulder and lifted her finger to her own lips.

Deena fell to the floor from a particularly violent blow. She did not stand up again. Instead, she got to her hands and knees and crawled toward the refuge behind the big iron stove. His naked foot shoved her rear so that she was sent sprawling on her face, moaning, her long stringy black hair falling over her face and birthmark.

Dorothy stepped forward and raised her hand to grab Old Man. Gummy stopped her, mumbling, "'S all right. Leave em alone."

"Look a that figurin female bein happy!" snorted Old Man. "You know why I *have* to beat the hell out a her, when all I want is peace and quiet? Cause I look like a figurin caveman, and they're supposed to beat their hoors silly. That's why she took up with me."

"You're an insane liar," said Deena softly from behind the stove, slowly and dreamily nursing her pain like the memory of a lover's caresses. "I came to live with you because I'd sunk so low you were the only man that'd have me."

"She's a retired high society mainliner, Dor'thy," said Paley. "You never seen her without a longsleeved dress on. That's cause her arms're full a holes. It was me that kicked the monkey off a her

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back. I cursed her with the wisdom and magic a the Real Folk, where you coax the evil spirit out by talkin it out. And she's been livin with me ever since. Can't get rid a her.

"Now, you take that toothless bag there. I ain't never hit her. That shows I ain't no woman-beatin bastard, right? I hit Deena cause she likes it, wants it, but I don't ever hit Gummy. . . . Hey, Gummy, that kind a medicine ain't what you want, is it?"

And he laughed his incredibly hoarse *hor, hor, hor.*

"You're a figurin liar," said Gummy, speaking over her shoulder because she was squatting down, fiddling with the TV controls. "You're the one knocked most a my teeth out."

"I knocked out a few rotten stumps you was gonna lose anyway. You had it comin cause you was runnin around with that O'Brien in his green shirt."

Gummy giggled and said, "Don't think for a minute I quit goin with that O'Brien in his green shirt just cause you slapped me around a little bit. I quit cause you was a better man 'n him."

Gummy giggled again. She rose and waddled across the room towards a shelf which held a bottle of her cheap perfume. Her enormous brass earrings swung, and her great hips swung back and forth.

"Look a that," said Old Man. "Like two bags a mush in a windstorm."

But his eyes followed them with kindling appreciation, and on seeing her pour the reeking liquid over her pillowsized bosom he hugged her and buried his huge nose in the valley of her breasts and sniffed rapturously.

"I feel like a dog that's found an old bone he buried and forgot till just now," he growled. "Arf, arf, arf!"

Deena snorted and said she had to get some fresh air or she'd lose her supper. She grabbed Dorothy's hand and insisted she take a walk with her. Dorothy, looking sick, went with her.

The following evening, as the four were drinking beer around the kitchen table, Old Man suddenly reached over and touched Dorothy affectionately. Gummy laughed, but Deena glared. However, she did not say anything to the girl but instead began accusing Paley of going too long without a bath. He called her a flat-chested hophead and said that she was lying, because he had been taking a bath every day for some time now and changing his clothes every other day. Deena replied that, yes, he had, ever since Dorothy had appeared on the scene. An argument raged. Finally, he rose from the table and turned the photograph of Deena's mother so it faced the wall.

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Wailing, Deena tried to face it outward again. He pushed her away from it, refusing to hit her despite her insults—even when she howled at him that he wasn't fit to lick her mother's shoes, let alone blaspheme her portrait by touching it.

Tired of the argument, he abandoned his post by the photograph and shuffled to the refrigerator.

"If you dare turn her around till I give the word, I'll throw her in the creek. And you'll never see her again."

Deena shrieked and crawled onto her blanket behind the stove and there lay sobbing and cursing him softly.

Gummy chewed tobacco and laughed while a brown stream ran down her toothless jaws. "Deena pushed him too far that time."

"Ah, her and her figurin mother," snorted Paley. "Hey, Dor'thy, you know how she laughs at me cause I think Fordiana's got a soul. And cause I put the evil eye on them hounds? And cause I think the salvation a us Paleys'll be when we find out where Old King's hat's been hidden?

"Well, get a load of this. This here intellekshooal purple-faced dragon, this retired mainliner, this old broken-down nag for a monkey-jockey, she's the sooperstishus one. She thinks her mother's a god. And she prays to her and asks forgiveness and asks what's gonna happen in the future. And when she thinks nobody's around, she talks to her. Here she is, worshippin her mother like the Old Woman In The Earth, who's The Old Guy's enemy. And she knows that makes the Old Guy sore. Maybe that's the reason he ain't allowed me to find the longlost headpiece a Old King, though he knows I been lookin in every ash heap from here to godknowswhere, hopin some fool *G'yaga* would throw it away, never realizin what it was.

"Well, by all that's holy, that pitcher stays with its ugly face to the wall. Aw, shut up, Deena, I wanna watch Alley Oop."

Shortly afterwards, Dorothy drove home. There she again phoned her sociology professor. Impatiently, he went into more detail. He said that one reason Old Man's story of the war between the Neanderthals and the invading *Homo Sapiens* was very unlikely was that there was evidence to indicate that *Homo Sapiens* might have been in Europe before the Neanderthals—it was very possible that *Homo Neanderthalensis* was the invader.

"Not invader in the modern sense," said the professor. "The influx of a new species or race or tribe into Europe during the Paleolithic would have been a sporadic migration of little groups, an immigration which might have taken a thousand to ten thousand years to complete.

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"And it is more than likely that *Neanderthalensis* and *Sapiens* lived side by side for millenia with very little fighting between them because both were too busy struggling for a living. For one reason or another, probably because he was outnumbered, the Neanderthal was absorbed by the surrounding peoples. Some anthropologists have speculated that the Neanderthals were blonds and that they had passed their light hair directly to North Europeans.

"Whatever the guesses and surmises," concluded the professor, "it would be impossible for such a distinctly different minority to keep its special physical and cultural characteristics over a period of half a hundred millenia. Paley has concocted this personal myth to compensate for his extreme ugliness, his inferiority, his feelings of rejection. The elements of the myth came from the comic books and TV.

"However," concluded the professor, "in view of your youthful enthusiasm and naiveté, I will reconsider my judgement if you bring me some physical evidence of his Neanderthaloid origin. Say you could show me that he had a taurodont tooth. I'd be flabbergasted, to say the least."

"But, Professor," she pleaded, "why can't you give him a personal examination? One look at Old Man's foot would convince you, I'm sure."

"My dear, I am not addicted to wild goose chases. My time is valuable."

That was that. The next day, she asked Old Man if he had ever lost a molar tooth or had an X-ray made of one.

"No," he said. "I got more sound teeth than brains. And I ain't gonna lose em. Long as I keep my headpiece, I'll keep my teeth and my digestion and my manhood. What's more, I'll keep my good sense, too. The loose-screw tighteners at the State Hospital really gave me a good goin-over, fore and aft, up and down, in and out, all night long, don't never take a hotel room right by the elevator. And they proved I wasn't hatched in a cuckoo clock. Even though they tore their hair and said somethin must be wrong. Specially after we had that row about my hat. I woun't let em take my blood for a test, you know, cause I figured they was goin to mix it with water—*G'yaga* magic—and turn my blood to water. Somehow, that Elkins got wise that I hadda wear my hat—cause I woun't take it off when I undressed for the physical, I guess—and he snatched my hat. And I was done for. Stealin it was stealin my soul; all Paleys wears their souls in their hats. I hadda get it back. So I ate humble pie; I let em poke and pry me all over and take my blood."

There was a pause while Paley breathed in deeply to get power

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to launch another verbal rocket. Dorothy, who had been struck by an idea, said, "Speaking of hats, Old Man, what does this hat that the daughter of Raw Boy stole from King Paley look like? Would you recognize it if you saw it?"

Old Man stared at her with wide blue eyes for a moment before he exploded.

"Would I recognize it? Would the dog that sat by the railroad tracks recognize his tail after the locomotive cut it off? Would you recognize your own blood if somebody stuck you in the guts with a knife and it pumped out with every heartbeat? Certainly, I would recognize the hat a Old King Paley! Every Paley at his mother's knee gits a detailed description a it. You want a hear about the hat? Well, hang on, chick, and I'll describe every hair and bone a it."

Dorothy told herself more than once that she should not be doing this. If she was trusted by Old Man, she was, in one sense, a false friend. But, she reassured herself, in another sense she was helping him. Should he find the hat, he might blossom forth, actually tear himself loose from the tabus that bound him to the dumpheap, to the alleys, to fear of dogs, to the conviction he was an inferior and oppressed citizen. Moreover, Dorothy told herself, it would aid her scientific studies to record his reactions.

The taxidermist she hired to locate the necessary materials and fashion them into the desired shape was curious, but she told him it was for an anthropological exhibit in Chicago and that it was meant to represent the headpiece of the medicine man of an Indian secret society dedicated to phallic mysteries. The taxidermist sniggered and said he'd give his eyeteeth to see those ceremonies.

Dorothy's intentions were helped by the run of good luck Old Man had in his alleypicking while she rode with him. Exultant, he swore he was headed for some extraordinary find; he could feel his good fortune building up.

"It's gonna hit," he said, grinning with his huge widely-spaced gravestone teeth. "Like lightning."

Two days later, Dorothy rose even earlier than usual and drove to a place behind the house of a well-known doctor. She had read in the society column that he and his family were vacationing in Alaska, so she knew they wouldn't be wondering at finding a garbage can already filled with garbage and a big cardboard box full of cast-off clothes. Dorothy had brought the refuse from her own apartment to make it seem as if the house were occupied. The old garments, with one exception, she had purchased at a Salvation Army store.

About nine that morning, she and Old Man drove down the alley on their scheduled route.

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Old Man was first off the truck; Dorothy hung back to let him make the discovery.

Old Man picked the garments out of the box one by one.

"Here's a velvet dress Deena kin wear. She's been complainin she hasn't had a new dress in a long time. And here's a blouse and skirt big enough to wrap around an elephant. Gummy kin wear it. And here . . ."

He lifted up a tall conical hat with a wide brim and two balls of felted horsemane attached to the band. It was a strange headpiece, fashioned of roan horsehide over a ribwork of split bones. It must have been the only one of its kind in the world, and it certainly looked out of place in the alley of a mid-Illinois city.

Old Man's eyes bugged out. Then they rolled up, and he fell to the ground as if shot. The hat, however, was still clutched in his hand.

Dorothy was terrified. She had expected any reaction but this. If he had suffered a heart-attack, it would, she thought, be her fault.

Fortunately, Old Man had only fainted. However, when he regained consciousness, he did not go into ecstasies as she had expected. Instead, he looked at her, his face grey, and said, "It kin't be! It must be a trick the Old Woman In The Earth's playin on me so she kin have the last laugh on me. How could it be the hat a Old King Paley's? Woun't the *G'yaga* that been keepin it in their famley all these years know what it is?"

"Probably not," said Dorothy. "After all, the *G'yaga*, as you call them, don't believe in magic any more. Or it might be that the present owner doesn't even know what it is."

"Maybe. More likely it was thrown out by accident during housecleaning. You know how stupid them wimmen are. Anyway, let's take it and get going. The Old Guy In The Sky might a had a hand in fixin up this deal for me, and if he did, it's better not to ask questions. Let's go."

Old Man seldom wore the hat. When he was home, he put it in the parrot cage and locked the cage door with the bicycle lock. At nights, the cage hung from the stand; days, it sat on the seat of the truck. Old Man wanted it always where he could see it.

Finding it had given him a tremendous optimism, a belief he could do anything. He sang and laughed even more than he had before, and he was even able to venture out onto the streets for several hours at a time before the sweat and shakings began.

Gummy, seeing the hat, merely grunted and made a lewd remark about its appearance. Deena smiled grimly and said, "Why haven't the horsehide and bones rotted away long ago?"

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"That's just the kind a question a *G'yaga* dummy like you'd ask," said Old Man, snorting. "How kin the hat rot when there's a million Paley souls crowded into it, standin room only? There ain't even elbow room for germs. Besides, the horsehide and the bones're jampacked with the power and the glory a all the Paleys that died before our battle with Raw Boy, and all the souls that died since. It's seething with soul-energy, the lid held on it by the magic a the *G'yaga.*"

"Better watch out it don't blow up 'n wipe us all out," said Gummy, sniggering.

"Now you have the hat, what are you going to do with it?" asked Deena.

"I don't know. I'll have to sit down with a beer and study the situation."

Suddenly, Deena began laughing shrilly.

"My God, you've been thinking for fifty thousand years about this hat, and now you've got it, you don't know what to do about it! Well, I'll tell you what you'll do about it! You'll get to thinking big, all right! You'll conquer the world, rid it of all False Folk, all right! You fool! Even if your story isn't the raving of a lunatic, it would still be too late for you! You're alone! The last! One against two billion! Don't worry, World, this ragpicking Rameses, this alley Alexander, this junkyard Julius Caesar, he isn't going to conquer you! No, he's going to put on his hat, and he's going forth! To do what?

"To become a wrestler on TV, that's what! That's the height of his halfwit ambition—to be billed as the One-Armed Neanderthal, the Awful Apeman. That is the culmination of fifty thousand years ha, ha, ha!"

The others looked apprehensively at Old Man, expecting him to strike Deena. Instead, he removed the hat from the cage, put it on, and sat down at the table with a quart of beer in his hand.

"Quit your cackling, you old hen," he said. "I got my thinking cap on."

The next day Paley, despite a hangover, was in a very good mood. He chattered all the way to the west bluff and once stopped the truck so he could walk back and forth on the street and show Dorothy he wasn't afraid.

Then, boasting he could lick the world, he drove the truck up an alley and halted it by the backyard of a huge but somewhat rundown mansion. Dorothy looked at him curiously. He pointed to the jungle-thick shrubbery that filled a corner of the yard.

"Looks like a rabbit coun't get in there, huh? But Old Man knows things the rabbits don't. Folly me."

Carrying the caged hat, he went to the shrubbery, dropped to all threes, and began inching his way

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through a very narrow passage. Dorothy stood looking dubiously into the tangle until a hoarse growl came from its depths.

"You scared? Or is your fanny too broad to get through here?"

"I'll try anything once," she announced cheerfully. In a short time she was crawling on her belly, then had come suddenly into a little clearing. Old Man was standing up. The cage was at his feet, and he was looking at a red rose in his hand.

She sucked in her breath. "Roses! Peonies! Violets!"

"Sure, Dor'thy," he said, swelling out his chest. "Paley's Garden a Eden, his secret hothouse. I found this place a couple a years ago, when I was looking for a place to hide if the cops was lookin for me or I just wanted a place to be alone from everybody, includin myself.

"I planted these rosebushes in here and these other flowers. I come here every now and then to check on em, spray em, prune em. I never take any home, even though I'd like to give Deena some. But Deena ain't no dummy, she'd know I wasn't gettin em out a garbage pail. And I just din't want to tell her about this place. Or anybody."

He looked directly at her as if to catch every twitch of a muscle in her face, every repressed emotion.

"You're the only person besides myself knows about this place." He held out the rose to her. "Here. It's yours."

"Thank you. I am proud, really proud, that you've shown this place to me."

"Really are? That makes me feel good. In fact, great."

"It's amazing. This, this spot of beauty. And . . . and . . ."

"I'll finish it for you. You never thought the ugliest man in the world, a dumpheaper, a man that ain't even a man or a human bein, a—I hate that word—a Neanderthal, could appreciate the beauty of a rose. Right? Well, I growed these because I loved em.

"Look, Dor'thy. Look at this rose. It's round, not like a ball but a flattened roundness . . ."

"Oval."

"Sure. And look at the petals, how they fold in on one another, how they're arranged. Like one ring a red towers protectin the next ring a red towers. Protectin the gold cup on the inside, the precious source a life, the treasure. Or maybe that's the golden hair a the princess a the castle. Maybe. And look at the bright green leaves under the rose. Beautiful, huh? The Old Guy knew what he was doin when he made these. He was an artist then.

"But he must a been sufferin from a hangover when he shaped me, huh? His hands was shaky that day. And he gave up after a while and never bothered to finish me

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but went on down to the corner for some a the hair a the dog that bit him."

Suddenly, tears filled Dorothy's eyes.

"You shouldn't feel that way. You've got beauty, sensitivity, a genuine feeling, under . . ."

"Under this?" he said, pointing his finger at his face. "Sure. Forget it. Anyway, look at these green buds on these baby roses. Pretty, huh? Fresh with promise a the beauty to come. They're shaped like the breasts a young virgins."

He took a step towards her and put his arm around her shoulders.

"Dor'thy."

She put both her hands on his chest and gently tried to shove herself away.

"Please," she whispered, "please, don't. Not after you've shown me how fine you really can be."

"What do you mean?" he said, not releasing her. "Ain't what I want to do with you just as fine and beautiful a thing as this rose here? And if you really feel for me, you'd want to let your flesh say what your mind thinks. Like the flowers when they open up for the sun."

She shook her head. "No. It can't be. Please. I feel terrible because I can't say yes. But I can't. I—you—there's too much diff—"

"Sure, we're diff'runt. Goin in diff'runt directions and then, comin round the corner—bam!—we run into each other, and we wrap our arms around each other to keep from fallin."

He pulled her to him so her face was pressed against his chest.

"See!" he rumbled. "Like this. Now, breathe deep. Don't turn your head. Sniff away. Lock yourself to me, like we was glued and nothin could pull us apart. Breathe deep. I got my arm around you, like these trees round these flowers. I'm not hurtin you; I'm givin you life and protectin you. Right? Breathe deep."

"Please," she whimpered. "Don't hurt me. Gently . . ."

"Gently it is. I won't hurt you. Not too much. That's right, don't hold yourself stiff against me, like you're stone. That's right, melt like butter. I'm not forcin you, Dor'thy, remember that. You want this, don't you?"

"Don't hurt me," she whispered. "You're so strong, oh, my God, so strong."

For two days, Dorothy did not appear at the Paley's. The third morning, in an effort to fire her courage, she downed two doubleshots of V.O. before breakfast. When she drove to the dumpheap, she told the two women that she had not been feeling well. But she had returned because she wanted to finish her study, as it was almost at an end and her superiors were anxious to get her report.

Paley, though he did not smile

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when he saw her, said nothing. However, he kept looking at her out of the corners of his eyes when he thought she was watching him. And though he took the hat in its cage with him, he sweated and shook as before while crossing the streets. Dorothy sat staring straight ahead, unresponding to the few remarks he did make. Finally, cursing under his breath, he abandoned his efforts to work as usual and drove to the hidden garden.

"Here we are," he said. "Adam and Eve returnin to Eden."

He peered from beneath the bony ridges of his brows at the sky. "We better hurry in. Looks as if the Old Guy got up on the wrong side a the bed. There's gonna be a storm."

"I'm not going in there with you," said Dorothy. "Not now or ever."

"Even after what we did, even if you said you loved me, I still make you sick?" he said. "You sure din't act then like Old Ugly made you sick."

"I haven't been able to sleep for two nights," she said tonelessly. "I've asked myself a thousand times why I did it. And each time I could only tell myself I didn't know. Something seemed to leap from you to me and take me over. I was powerless."

"You certainly wasn't paralyzed," said Old Man, placing his hand on her knee. "And if you was powerless, it was because you wanted to be."

"It's no use talking," she said. "You'll never get a chance again. And take your hand off of me. It makes my flesh crawl."

He dropped his hand.

"All right. Back to business. Back to pickin people's piles a junk. Let's get out a here. Fergit what I said. Fergit this garden, too. Fergit the secret I told you. Don't tell nobody. The dumpheapers'd laugh at me. Imagine Old Man Paley, the one-armed candidate for the puzzle factory, the fugitive from the Old Stone Age, growin peonies and roses! Big laugh, huh?"

Dorothy did not reply. He started the truck, and as they emerged onto the alley, they saw the sun disappear behind the clouds. The rest of the day, it did not again come out, and Old Man and Dorothy did not speak to each other.

As they were going down Route 24 after unloading at the junkdealer's, they were stopped by a patrolman. He ticketed Paley for not having a chauffeur's license and made Paley follow him downtown to court. There Old Man had to pay a fine of twenty-five dollars. This, to everybody's amazement, he produced from his pocket.

As if that weren't enough, he had to endure the jibes of the police and the courtroom loafers. Evidently he had appeared in the police station before and was

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known as *King Kong, Alley Oop,* or just plain Chimp. Old Man trembled, whether with suppressed rage or nervousness Dorothy could not tell. But later, as Dorothy drove him home, he almost frothed at the mouth in a tremendous outburst of rage. By the time they were within sight of his shanty, he was shouting that his life savings had been wiped out and that it was all a plot by the *G'yaga* to beat him down to starvation.

It was then that the truck's motor died. Cursing, Old Man jerked the hood open so savagely that one rusty hinge broke. Further enraged by this, he tore the hood completely off and threw it away into the ditch by the roadside. Unable to find the cause of the breakdown, he took a hammer from the tool-chest and began to beat the sides of the truck.

"I'll make her go, go, go!" he shouted. "Or she'll wish she had! Run, you bitch, purr, eat gasoline, rumble your damn belly and eat gasoline but run, run, run! Or your ex-lover, Old Man, sells you for junk, I swear it!"

Undaunted, Fordiana did not move.

Eventually, Paley and Dorothy had to leave the truck by the ditch and walk home. And as they crossed the heavily traveled highway to get to the dumpheap, Old Man was forced to jump to keep from getting hit by a car.

He shook his fist at the speeding auto.

"I know you're out to get me! he howled. "But you won't! You been tryin for fifty thousand years, and you ain't made it yet! We're still fightin!"

At that moment the black sagging bellies of the clouds overhead ruptured. The two were soaked before they could take four steps. Thunder bellowed, and lightning slammed into the earth on the other end of the dumpheap.

Old Man growled with fright, but, seeing he was untouched, he raised his fist to the sky.

"O.K., O.K., so you got it in for me, too. I get it. O.K., OK!"

Dripping, the two entered the shanty, where he opened a quart of beer and began drinking. Deena took Dorothy behind a curtain and gave her a towel to dry herself with and one of her white terrycloth robes to put on. By the time Dorothy came out from behind the curtain, she found Old Man opening his third quart. He was accusing Deena of not frying the fish correctly, and when she answered him sharply, he began accusing her of every fault, big or small, real or imaginary, of which he could think. In fifteen minutes, he was nailing the portrait of her mother to the wall with its face inwards. And she was whimpering behind the stove and tenderly stroking the spots where

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he had struck her. Gummy protested, and he chased her out into the rain.

Dorothy at once put her wet clothes on and announced she was leaving. She'd walk the mile into town and catch the bus.

Old Man snarled, "Go! You're too snotty for us, anyway. We ain't your kind, and that's that."

"Don't go," pleaded Deena. "If you're not here to restrain him, he'll be terrible to us."

"I'm sorry," said Dorothy. "I should have gone home this morning."

"You sure should," he growled. And then he began weeping, his pushed-out lips fluttering like a bird's wings, his face twisted like a gargoyle's.

"Get out before I fergit myself and throw you out," he sobbed.

Dorothy, with pity on her face, shut the door gently behind her.

The following day was Sunday. That morning, her mother phoned her she was coming down from Waukegan to visit her. Could she take Monday off?

Dorothy said yes, and then, sighing, she called her supervisor. She told him she had all the data she needed for the Paley report and that she would begin typing it out.

Monday night, after seeing her mother off on the train, she decided to pay the Paleys a farewell visit. She could not endure another sleepless night filled with fighting the desire to get out of bed again and again, to scrub herself clean, and the pain of having to face Old Man and the two women in the morning. She felt that if she said goodbye to the Paleys, she could say farewell to those feelings, too, or, at least, time would wash them away more quickly.

The sky had been clear, star-filled, when she left the railroad station. By the time she had reached the dumpheap, clouds had swept out from the west, and a blinding rainstorm was deluging the city. Going over the bridge, she saw by the lights of her headlamps that the Kickapoo Creek had become a small river in the two days of heavy rains. Its muddy frothing current roared past the dump and on down to the Illinois River, a half a mile away.

So high had it risen that the waters lapped at the doorsteps of the shanties. The trucks and jalopies parked outside them were piled high with household goods, and their owners were ready to move at a minute's notice.

Dorothy parked her car a little off the road, because she did not want to get it stuck in the mire. By the time she had walked to the Paley shanty, she was in stinking mud up to her calves, and night had fallen.

In the light streaming from a window stood Fordiana, which

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Old Man had apparently succeeded in getting started. Unlike the other vehicles, it was not loaded.

Dorothy knocked on the door and was admitted by Deena. Paley was sitting in the ragged easy chair. He was clad only in a pair of faded and patched blue jeans. One eye was surrounded by a big black, blue, and green bruise. The horsehide hat of Old King was firmly jammed onto his head, and one hand clutched the neck of a quart of beer as if he were choking it to death.

Dorothy looked curiously at the black eye but did not comment on it. Instead, she asked him why he hadn't packed for a possible flood.

Old Man waved the naked stump of his arm at her.

"It's the doins a the Old Guy In The Sky. I prayed to the old idiot to stop the rain, but it rained harder'n ever. So I figure it's really the Old Woman In The Earth who's kickin up this rain. The Old Guy's too feeble to stop her. He needs strength. So . . . I thought about pourin out the blood a a virgin to him, so he kin lap it up and get his muscles back with that. But I give that up, cause there ain't no such thing any more, not within a hundred miles a here, anyway.

"So . . . I been thinkin about goin outside and doin the next best thing, that is, pourin a quart or two a beer out on the ground for him. What the Greeks call pourin a liberation to the Gods . . ."

"Don't let him drink none a that cheap beer," warned Gummy. "This rain fallin on us is bad enough. I don't want no god pukin all over the place."

He hurled the quart at her. It was empty, because he wasn't so far gone he'd waste a full or even half-full bottle. But it was smashed against the wall, and since it was worth a nickel's refund, he accused Gummy of malicious waste.

"If you'd a held still, it woun't a broke."

Deena paid no attention to the scene. "I'm pleased to see you, child," she said. "But it might have been better if you had stayed home tonight."

She gestured at the picture of her mother, still nailed face inwards. "He's not come out of his evil mood yet."

"You kin say that again," mumbled Gummy. "He got a pistol-whippin from that young Limpy Doolan who lives in that packin-box house with the Jantzen bathing suit ad pasted on the side, when Limpy tried to grab Old King's hat off a Old Man's head jist for fun."

"Yeah, he tried to grab it," said Paley. "But I slapped his hand hard. Then he pulls a gun out a his coat pocket with the other hand and hit me in this eye with

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its butt. That don't stop me. He sees me comin at him like I'm late for work, and he says he'll shoot me if I touch him again. My old man din't raise no silly sons, so I don't charge him. But I'll get him sooner or later. And he'll be limpin in both legs, if he walks at all.

"But I don't know why I never had nothin but bad luck ever since I got this hat. It ain't supposed to be that way. It's supposed to be bringin me all the good luck the Paleys ever had."

He glared at Dorothy and said, "Do you know what? I had good luck until I showed you that place, you know, the flowers. And then, after you know what, everything went sour as old milk. What did you do, take the power out a me by doin what you did? Did the Old Woman In The Earth send you to me so you'd draw the muscle and luck and life out a me if I found the hat when Old Guy placed it in my path?"

He lurched up from the easy-chair, clutched two quarts of beer from the refrigerator to his chest, and staggered towards the door.

"Kin't stand the smell in here. Talk about *my* smell. I'm sweet violets, compared to the fish a some a you. I'm goin out where the air's fresh. I'm goin out and talk to the Old Guy In The Sky, hear what the thunder has to say to me. He understands me; he don't give a damn if I'm a ugly ole man that's ha'f-ape."

Swiftly, Deena ran in front of him and held out her claws at him like a gaunt, enraged alley cat.

"So that's it! You've had the indecency to insult this young girl! You evil beast!"

Old Man halted, swayed, carefully deposited the two quarts on the floor. Then he shuffled to the picture of Deena's mother and ripped it from the wall. The nails screeched; so did Deena.

"What are you going to do?"

"Somethin I been wantin to do for a long long time. Only I felt sorry for you. Now I don't. I'm gonna throw this idol a yours into the creek. Know why? Cause I think she's a delegate a the Old Woman In The Earth, Old Guy's enemy. She's been sent here to watch on me and report to Old Woman on what I was doin. And you're the one brought her in this house."

"Over my dead body you'll throw that in the creek!" screamed Deena.

"Have it your way," he growled, lurching forward and driving her to one side with his shoulder.

Deena grabbed at the frame of the picture he held in his hand, but he hit her over the knuckles with it. Then he lowered it to the floor, keeping it from falling over with his leg while he bent over and picked up the two quarts in his huge hand. Clutching them, he squatted until his stump was level

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with the top part of the frame. The stump clamped down over the upper part of the frame, he straightened, holding it tightly, lurched towards the door, and and was gone into the driving rain and crashing lightning.

Deena stared into the darkness for a moment, then ran after him.

Stunned, Dorothy watched them go. Not until she heard Gummy mumbling, "They'll kill each other," was Dorothy able to move.

She ran to the door, looked out, turned back to Gummy.

"What's got into him?" she cried. "He's so cruel, yet I know he has a soft heart. Why must he be this way?"

"It's you," said Gummy. "He thought it din't matter how he looked, what he did, he was still a Paley. He thought his sweat would git you like it did all them chicks he was braggin about, no matter how uppity the sweet young things was. 'N you hurt him when you din't dig him. Specially cause he thought more a you 'n anybody before.

"Why'd you think life's been so miserable for us since he found you? What the hell, a man's a man, he's always got the eye for the chicks, right? Deena din't see that. Deena hates Old Man. But Deena can't do without him, either . . ."

"I have to stop them," said Dorothy, and she plunged out into the black and white world.

Just outside the door, she halted, bewildered. Behind her, light streamed from the shanty, and to the north was a dim glow from the city of Onaback. But elsewhere was darkness. Darkness, except when the lightning burned away the night for a dazzling frightening second.

She ran around the shanty towards the Kickapoo, some fifty yards away—she was sure that they'd be somewhere by the bank of the creek. Halfway to the stream, another flash showed her a white figure by the bank.

It was Deena in her terrycloth robe, Deena now sitting up in the mud, bending forward, shaking with sobs.

"I got down on my knees," she moaned. "To him, to him. And I begged him to spare my mother. But he said I'd thank him later for freeing me from worshipping a false goddess. He said I'd kiss his hand."

Deena's voice rose to a scream. "And then he did it! He tore my blessed mother to bits! Threw her in the creek! I'll kill him! I'll kill him!"

Dorothy patted Deena's shoulder. "There, there. You'd better get back to the house and get dry. It's a bad thing he's done, but he's not in his right mind. "Where'd he go?"

"Towards that clump of cottonwoods where the creek runs into the river."

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"You go back," said Dorothy. "I'll handle him. I can do it."

Deena seized her hand.

"Stay away from him. He's hiding in the woods now. He's dangerous, dangerous as a wounded boar. Or as one of his ancestors when they were hurt and hunted by ours."

"Ours?" said Dorothy. "You mean you believe his story?"

"Not all of it. Just part. That tale of his about the mass invasion of Europe and King Paley's hat is nonsense. Or, at last it's been distorted through God only knows how many thousands of years."

"But it's true he's at least part Neanderthal. Listen! I've fallen low, I'm only a junkman's whore. Not even that, now—Old Man never touches me any more, except to hit me. And that's not his fault, really. I ask for it; I want it.

"But I'm not a moron. I got books from the library, read what they said about the Neanderthal. I studied Old Man carefully. And I *know* he must be what he says he is. Gummy too—she's at least a quarter-breed."

Dorothy pulled her hand out of Deena's grip.

"I have to go. I have to talk to Old Man, tell him I'm not seeing him any more."

"Stay away from him," pleaded Deena, again seizing Dorothy's hand. "You'll go to talk, and you'll stay to do what I did; what a score of others did. We let him make love to us because he isn't human. "Yet, we found Old Man as human as any man, and some of us stayed after the lust was gone because love had come in."

Dorothy gently unwrapped Deena's fingers from her hand and began walking away.

Soon she came to the group of cottonwood trees by the bank where the creek and the river met and there she stopped.

"Old Man!" she called in a break between the rolls of thunder. "Old Man! It's Dorothy!"

A growl as of a bear disturbed in his cave answered her, and a figure like a tree trunk come to life stepped out of the inkiness between the cottonwoods.

"What you come for?" he said, approaching so close to her that his enormous nose almost touched hers. "You want me just as I am, Old Man Paley, descendant a the Real Folk—Paley, who loves you? Or you come to give the batty old junkman a tranquillizer so you kin take him by the hand like a lamb and lead him back to the slaughterhouse, the puzzle factory, where they'll stick a ice pick back a his eyeball and rip out what makes him a man and not an ox."

"I came . . ."

"Yeah?"

"For this!" she shouted, and she snatched off his hat and raced away from him, towards the river.

Behind her rose a bellow of agony so loud she could hear it

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even above the thunder. Feet splashed as he gave pursuit.

Suddenly, she slipped and sprawled face down in the mud. At the same time, her glasses fell off. Now it was her turn to feel utter despair, for in this halfworld she could see nothing without her glasses except the lightning flashes. She must find them. But if she delayed to hunt for them, she'd lose her headstart.

She cried out with joy, for her groping fingers found what they sought. But the breath was knocked out of her, and she dropped the glasses again as a heavy weight fell upon her back and half-stunned her. Vaguely, she was aware that the hat had been taken away from her. A moment later, as her senses came back into focus, she realized she was being raised into the air. Old Man was holding her in the crook of his arm, supporting part of her weight on his bulging belly.

"My glasses. Please, my glasses. I need them."

"You won't be needin em for a while. But don't worry about em. I got em in my pants pocket. Old Man's takin care a you."

His arm tightened around her so she cried out with pain.

Hoarsely, he said, "You was sent down by the *G'yaga* to get that hat, wasn't you? Well, it din't work cause the Old Guy's stridin the sky tonight, and he's protectin his own."

Dorothy bit her lip to keep from telling him that she had wanted to destroy the hat because she hoped that that act would also destroy the guilt of having made it in the first place. But she couldn't tell him that. If he knew she had made a false hat, he would kill her in his rage.

"No. Not again," she said. "Please. Don't. I'll scream. They'll come after you. They'll take you to the State Hospital and lock you up for life. I swear I'll scream."

"Who'll hear you? Only the Old Guy, and he'd get a kick out a seein you in this fix cause you're a Falser and you took the stuffin right out a my hat and me with your Falser magic. But I'm gettin back what's mine and his, the same way you took it from me. The door swings both ways."

He stopped walking and lowered her to a pile of wet leaves.

"Here we are. The forest like it was in the old days. Don't worry. Old Man'll protect you from the cave bear and the bull o' the woods. But who'll protect you from Old Man, huh?"

Lightning exploded so near that for a second they were blinded and speechless. Then Paley shouted, "The Old Guy's whoopin it up tonight, just like he used to do! Blood and murder and wickedness're ridin the howlin night air!"

He pounded his immense chest with his huge fist.

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"Let the Old Guy and the Old Woman fight it out tonight. They ain't going to stop us, Dor'thy. Not unless that hairy old god in the clouds is goin to fry me with his lightnin, jealous a me cause I'm havin what he can't."

Lightning rammed against the ground from the charged skies, and lightning leaped up to the clouds from the charged earth. The rain fell harder than before, as if it were being shot out of a great pipe from a mountain river and pouring directly over them. But for some time the flashes did not come close to the cottonwoods. Then, one ripped apart the night beside them, deafened and stunned them.

And Dorothy, looking over Old Man's shoulder, thought she would die of fright because there was a ghost standing over them. It was tall and white, and its shroud flapped in the wind, and its arms were raised in a gesture like a curse.

But it was a knife, not a curse, that it held in its hand and was directing at them.

Then, the fire that rose like a cross behind the figure was gone, and night rushed back in.

Dorothy screamed. Old Man grunted, as if something had knocked the breath from him.

He rose to his knees, gasped something unintelligible, and slowly got to his feet. He turned his back to Dorothy so he could face the thing in white. Lightning flashed again. Once more Dorothy screamed, for she saw the knife sticking out of his back.

Then the white figure had rushed towards Old Man. But instead of attacking him, it dropped to its knees and tried to kiss his hand and babbled for forgiveness.

No ghost. No man. Deena, in her white terrycloth robe.

"I did it because I love you!" screamed Deena.

Old Man, swaying back and forth, was silent.

"I went back to the shanty for a knife, and I came here because I knew what you'd be doing, and I didn't want Dorothy's life ruined because of you, and I hated you, and I wanted to kill you. But I don't really hate you."

Slowly, Paley reached behind him and gripped the handle of the knife. Lightning made everything white around him, and by its brief glare the women saw him jerk the blade free of his flesh.

Dorothy moaned, "It's terrible, terrible. All my fault, all my fault."

She groped through the mud until her fingers came across the Old Man's jeans and its backpocket, which held her glasses. She put the glasses on, only to find that she could not see anything because of the darkness. Then, and not until then, she became concerned about locating

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her own clothes. On her hands and knees she searched through the wet leaves and grass. She was about to give up and go back to Old Man when another lightning flash showed the heap to her left. Giving a cry of joy, she began to crawl to it.

But another stroke of lightning showed her something else. She screamed and tried to stand up but instead slipped and fell forward on her face.

Old Man, knife in hand, was walking slowly towards her.

"Don't try to run away!" he bellowed. "You'll never get away! The Old Guy'll light things up for me so you kin't sneak away in the dark. Besides, your white skin shines in the night, like a rotten toadstool. You're done for. You snatched away my hat so you could get me out here defenseless, and then Deena could stab me in the back. You and her are Falser witches, I know damn well!"

"What do you think you're doing?" asked Dorothy. She tried to rise again but could not. It was as if the mud had fingers around her ankles and knees.

"The Old Guy's howlin for the blood a *G'yaga* wimmen. And he's gonna get all the blood he wants. It's only fair. Deena put the knife in me, and the Old Woman got some a my blood to drink. Now it's your turn to give the Old Guy some a yours."

"Don't!" screamed Deena. "Don't! Dorothy had nothing to do with it! And you can't blame me, after what you were doing to her!"

"She's done everything to me. I'm gonna make the last sacrifice to Old Guy. Then they kin do what they want to me. I don't care. I'll have had one moment a bein a real Real Folker."

Deena and Dorothy both screamed. In the next second, lightning broke the darkness around them. Dorothy saw Deena hurl herself on Old Man's back and carry him downward. Then, night again.

There was a groan. Then, another blast of light. Old Man was on his knees, bent almost double but not bent so far Dorothy could not see the handle of the knife that was in his chest.

"Oh, Christ!" wailed Deena. "When I pushed him, he must have fallen on the knife. I heard the bone in his chest break. Now he's dying!"

Paley moaned. "Yeah, you done it now, you sure paid me back, didn't you? Paid me back for my takin the monkey off a your back and supportin you all these years."

"Oh, Old Man," sobbed Deena, "I didn't mean to do it. I was just trying to save Dorothy and save you from yourself. Please! Isn't there anything I can do for you?"

"Sure you kin. Stuff up the two big holes in my back and chest.

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My blood, my breath, my real soul's flowin out a me. Guy In The Sky, what a way to die! Kilt by a crazy woman!"

"Keep quiet," said Dorothy. "Save your strength. Deena, you run to the service station. It'll still be open. Call a doctor."

"Don't go, Deena," he said. "It's too late. I'm hangin on to my soul by its big toe now; in a minute I'll have to let go, and it'll jump out a me like a beagle after a rabbit.

"Dor'thy, Dor'thy, was it the wickedness a the Old Woman put you up to this? I must a meant somethin to you . . . under the flowers . . . maybe it's better . . . I felt like a god, then . . . not what I really am . . . a crazy old junkman . . . a alley man . . . Just think a it . . . fifty thousand years behint me . . . older'n Adam and Eve by far . . . now, this . . ."

Deena began weeping. He lifted his hand, and she seized it.

"Let loose," he said, faintly. "I was gonna knock hell outta you for blubberin . . . just like a Falser bitch . . . kill me . . . then cry . . . you never did 'preciate me . . like Dor'thy . . ."

"His hand's getting cold," murmured Deena.

"Deena, bury that damn hat with me . . . least you kin do . . . Hey, Deena, who you goin to for help when you hear that monkey chitterin outside the door, huh? Who . . . ?"

Suddenly, before Dorothy and Deena could push him back down, he sat up. At the same time, lightning hammered into the earth nearby and it showed them his eyes, looking past them out into the night.

He spoke, and his voice was stronger, as if life had drained back into him through the holes in his flesh.

"Old Guy's givin me a good send-off. Lightnin and thunder. The works. Nothin cheap about him, huh? Why not? He knows this is the end a the trail fer me. The last a his worshippers . . . last a the Paleys . . ."

He choked on his own blood and sank back and spoke no more.

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It is well known that a satellite can be put in orbit in such a way that it will sit steady over one fixed point on Earth. But have you thought about the infinite possible variations on that pattern? Mr. Rolf has, and offers some fascinating examples below.

SATELLITE TRAILS

by Kenn Rolf

MAYBE TWO BODIES CAN'T OCCUPY the same space at the same time, but how many orbits at once does a satellite have? The answer is: two. This is really no news—we have all been aware, in a sort of background way, that the various satellite vehicles have woven paths of varying intricacy over our heads. Yet all they've really done is go 'round and 'round—in quite simple, uncomplicated paths. The path can be a perfect circle, or it can—more likely—be an ellipse of greater or lesser eccentricity. Yet it is only 'round and 'round.

But that is only what we may call its "spatial" orbit. That is how it would look viewed from out in space, say from the Moon. However, viewed from the surface of the Earth, around which we shall assume it goes, the orbit makes quite a different pattern. Let us take the simplest possible case, and see how drastically the spatial orbit and the "geographical" orbit can differ from one another. This case is one which is already quite generally well known and understood, from Sunday supplement and other popular science articles. It will be a good jumping-off point.

Suppose that a satellite vehicle —hereafter called just plain satellite—has been launched from Earth's equator and headed due east. It is to go around the Earth in line with the equator, in an orbit to all intents and purposes perfectly circular. Let us spurn the mathematics of the situation and say further merely that its speed and distance from the Earth's center, are such that it exactly matches the rotational speed of that body. It will happen to be about 22,000 miles up, if certain engineering conditions are adhered to, but no matter. Spatially speaking, the orbit will look like this:

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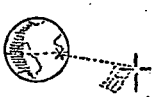
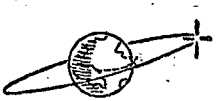
However, geographically speaking, it will have no orbit at all! It will remain fixed and motionless over exactly the same geographical spot on Earth, like a ball on the top of an immensely tall flagpole. This is the type of space "station" commonly proposed as a radio and television message relay center. It would bounce signals back and forth to Earth, and three or four of them properly spaced could provide continuous message relay coverage for practically the entire Earth. If we must represent its geographical orbit graphically, we can do so only with a point, thus:

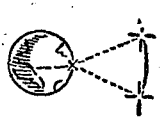


Now let us alter the direction of the spatial orbit so that, instead of travelling always over the equator, it starts off in a northeasterly direction, its plane of revolution now being an angle to the equator. Also, we'll have it maintain the same relative speed as before, going once around the Earth while the Earth also turns once in the same direction. From space its orbit might look like this:



Since it matches the Earth's rotation, it obviously cannot go "around" the Earth, geographically speaking, in spite of the fact that, spatially, it does just that. It is just these differences in rate, angle of plane of revolution to Earth's rotation, and shape of orbit which are the basis of the differences between spatial and geographical orbits.

But now, although it will remain fixed at the same longitude —or east-west point—it will move back and forth north and south. Once each day it will cross the sky toward the north, and once each day go back again the same distance to the south. Geographically speaking, its "orbit" is nothing more than a simple, fairly short, straight line in the sky. Again, it does not "go around" the Earth at all.



There are some interesting side issues to this situation which may not be immediately thought of. For instance, viewed from directly underneath at the equator, the satellite will appear to pass straight northward overhead, come to a stop somewhere in the northern sky (how far north depending on at how much of an angle the spatial orbit is tilted with respect to the equator), then im-

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mediately start south again. It will again pass directly overhead and into the southern sky, where it will come to a stop at a point complementary to its northerly excursion, and at once start back north again. This path will be repeated once each day. You could set your watch by it.

But if you were a few hundred miles west, the satellite would appear to shuttle back and forth in the eastern sky, northward-southward, never rising any further, never setting. And if you were directly under the point of its northernmost excursion, it would appear to arrive once each day directly overhead, then go back southward, perhaps to disappear for a while below the southern horizon, but coming back again right on time to that point directly overhead. If you were below the horizon relative to it, you would never see it at all, for it would never appear over your geographical location. And so on.

Now let's see what will happen if we slow it up a little. Say it takes 25 hours to make one complete circuit of the Earth, instead of 24. Obviously, it will no longer keep up with the Earth's rotation, and will fall back a little each day. It will still shuttle back and forth, north and south, as before, but now that shuttle-line will move sideways westward at the rate of 15 degrees of arc per day, finally setting below the western horizon, and not arriving directly overhead again until 24 days later. This time it *will* go around the Earth, geographically speaking, but in a zigzag fashion. Its path will look something like this:

(Again, to avoid tedious mathematics, no attempt at precision in values or measurements is being made.)

Now we begin to see the possibilities. A simple, circular spatial orbit can generate a quite dissimilar and surprising geographical path. The orbits described so far are pretty elementary. What will happen if orbits of increased elongation, greater or lesser velocities, other planes of travel, are considered, not merely in the direction of the Earth's rotation, but in the other direction as well? We'll look at just one more analyzed instance, and then show a whole bunch of geographical orbits whose spatial orbits you can, if you want to, work out for yourself.

For this one, we'll go back to the plane of the equator again, as in our first illustration, but this time instead of a circular orbit, we'll suppose more or less of an ellipse, like this:

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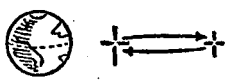
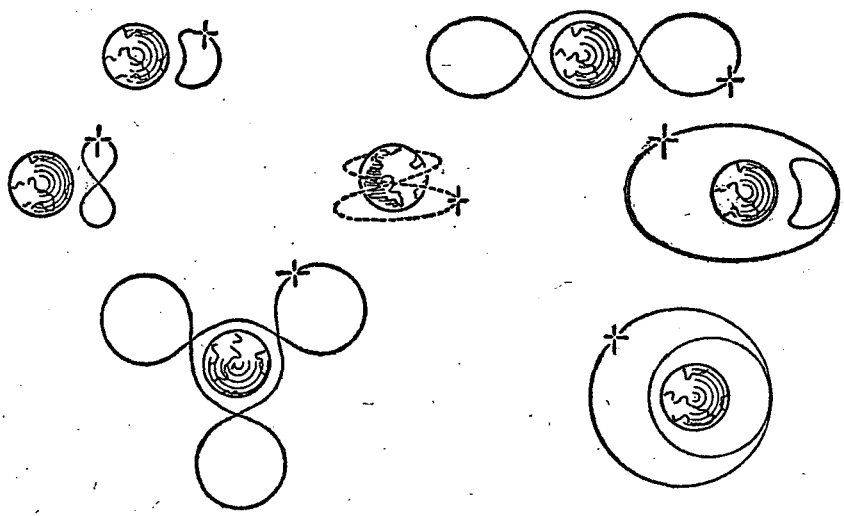
Of course, our satellite will not move at a uniform speed now, since it will speed up as it comes closer to perigee and slow down toward apogee, but we shall say that these speeds average out to 24 hours for the round trip. Like our first instance, the satellite will remain fixed over the same spot on the surface of the Earth. The variations in speed may cause some east-west wobble, but substantially the spot may be said to be stationary. But now it will not stay at the same height. It will regularly approach and recede on a vertical path, like a yo-yo, thus:



If the spatial plane of orbit be tilted with respect to the equator, the satellite will not only now alternately approach and recede, but will shuttle back and forth, north and south, as well. Geographically, its path will be a loop endlessly circling off one side of the Earth, like this:

These have been the simplest ones. The possible complications are literally endless, if you care to consider all the possible choices of speeds, distances, directions, elongations of ellipse, and planes of spatial orbit. Here are some doozies, for you to figure out for yourself:



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"It's not safe to do favors in Manacle," said the grumpy old man from Iowa. "Something about the place." It made him mad. So he put a curse on the town, and sat around to watch it work . . .

THE IOWAN'S CURSE

by Charles G. Finney

AFTER THE DEFENSE PLANT SHUT down, people left Manacle, Arizona, in droves. They had to. It was a one-industry town; with that one industry gone, you couldn't even make a living taking in your neighbor's washing because, chances were, you didn't even have a neighbor any longer.

That was why we settled there. We had our own money and wanted to live in a place where it was quiet. Manacle was very quiet. The climate there was just what the doctor had ordered for both of us.

We bought a nice little place several miles from the town proper. It consisted of a small and very comfortable house and ten fenced acres of unimproved desert land. Slightly off center in the ten-acre plot was an outcropping of rock that reared about thirty feet in the air and could be easily climbed. This was known locally as "The Cathedral." It made a good landmark.

We bought mostly new things for our little house, and it was a jewel of coziness when we finally had everything arranged to our satisfaction. Jane got out her brushes and paints and easel. I decided to bird-watch. I had some books on Arizona birds.

We had a visitor about five days after we moved in. He was a grumpy old man, older than I at any rate, and much grumpier. He was from Iowa, had made his money in the haberdashery business, and had come to southern Arizona to get away from the severe Iowa winters and to see if the climate would help his wife's asthma.

"She never had a comfortable day in Iowa," he said. "Here she can sleep nights again."

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Going on four years now."

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"How do you like it?"

"Why, the weather's right enough, but there's something wrong with the place."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, I don't rightly know. But it seems like when you do a favor or something for anybody out here, they turn against you."

"That's odd," I said.

"It ain't odd," said the grumpy old Iowan. "It's the work of the Devil. It ain't only people does it to you; it's everything."

"I don't understand," I said.

"Well, it's like this," he explained. "My missus is a friendly type woman. She likes people; that is, she did. Well, we had a neighbor when we first came here. Young woman married to a young fellah who worked in the defense plant. Lived right next door to us. Well, my missus went over there calling one day, and the young woman she was there with her baby, and the baby was sick, and the house looked awful; and my missus hates a messed-up house. So she says to the young woman, 'You tend your baby, honey, and I'll kinda straighten up a little for you.' And she did it. She made the beds and swept the floor and did the dishes, stacks of dishes. And the young woman was real grateful, and the baby got better, and my missus felt like she had done a good deed. She told me so when she came home.

"Next day she went over there again. The house was still kinda clean, but there was that sink again piled high with dirty dishes, and the young woman said the baby had been so pickety and fretful that she just hadn't had the time to get to her dishes. So my missus said, 'Honey, you just sit there and tend your baby, and I'll do your dishes.' So she did them, stacks of them. And then she sat and visited with the young woman for a spell and then she came on home.

"Well, after a couple of more days, she went over to see the young woman again, and there the house was looking like the city dump, and the sink piled high with dirty dishes. And this time the baby wasn't even sick. It was laughing in its crib. My missus she just sat this time and never offered to do anything; and when she left the young woman didn't ask her to come back again. And the young woman also told some of her friends that my missus was a nosy old fool that liked to stick her beak into other folk's business.

"'Well,' I said, 'Mother, those things happen. You did that young woman a good turn, but she didn't appreciate it. Thank goodness, everybody isn't like that.'

"That's what I thought. Till it got to be my turn.

"I was driving back from town, see, and there's a fellow and his wife that we knew slightly standing by their car in the middle of

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the road. Their car had gone dead on them, and I offered to give them a shove. They were real grateful and said thanks and hopped into their car, and I drove up slow till the bumpers touched and started to shove them. Well, I shoved them maybe a mile, and there was a chug hole or something in the road, and his bumper went down and my bumper went up; and the things latched. He was a real excitable fellah, and he jumped out of his car and started cussing me for not driving more careful, specially when I was pushing him. I told him to settle down and take it easy. I got a tire iron and prized the bumpers apart. Then I told him to get back in his car, and I'd push him the rest of the way. Which I did.

"Well, it seems when I prized the bumpers apart with the tire iron I must of bunged his up some way, because when we got to his place and stopped and I backed away, why, his rear bumper came away with me. His wife bawled and he cussed. He came at me till he saw I still had that tire iron in my hand.

"I drove off. He sued me for damaging his car, and I had to pay. I said to Mother: 'Next time you see me doing anything in the way of a favor for anybody, kick me quick so's I'll stop.'

"'You do the same for me,' said Mother. And we've never done any favors since. It's not safe to do favors in Manacle. Something about the place."

I asked him why he and his wife kept staying on at Manacle if they disliked the people so.

"Revenge," he said. "I put my curse on this place, and me and Mother are staying here to watch it work."

"Is it working?" I asked.

"Something's working," he said with a mixture of a snort and a laugh. "The defense plant's shut down. There ain't any work for the dear neighbors. The young woman who was so snotty with my missus had to go back to her folks in Oklahoma with her baby when her husband ran off with another woman. That sweet-tempered fellah I gave the push for when his car was stalled got fired when the plant closed and lost his house and his car, too. It's that way with everybody. Except me and Mother. We ain't dependent on any defense plant. It it ain't my curse that's working on Manacle, it's somebody's curse. And that's good enough for me and Mother.

"Mind you," he concluded, "I never had the idea of doing you a favor when I stopped by here to say hello. And don't get the idea that I have done you a favor. I ain't. I have given you a warning and that's all. I don't do favors any more."

With that he left, and Jane came out of the house to see who it was I had been talking to.

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"It was just an old nut with a grudge against the world," I said. "Because of a few coincidental irks, he thinks everybody's against him. He just stopped by to warn me about Manacle."

"But why should he warn you?" asked Jane. "And against what?"

"He says he put a curse on Manacle," I explained, "and he seemed to imply that the curse might affect us, too."

"Where's the old buzzard from?" asked Jane.

"Iowa."

"Is there anything particularly lethal about an Iowan's curse?"

"He seemed to think there was."

"Well, I feel sorry for him," said Jane. "It's such beautiful country here. His attitude seems so silly. Is there any way of avoiding his curse?"

"I'm not sure," I said, "but from what I gathered the best way is not to do favors for anyone. That way you escape it."

"Well," said Jane, "that should be easy enough for us, for we are very selfish people, and doing favors is absolutely foreign to our natures. When is the last time you did a favor for anyone?"

I tried to think back but couldn't remember a single one.

Jane said: "Well, curse or no curse, we'll have to chance it and drive into Manacle to get some groceries. Let's take the Cadillac instead of the pickup, and not look so rancherish for a change."

So we got into the Cadillac, and we sped along over the beautifully tended gravel desert road. We had driven perhaps two miles when up ahead we saw a girl standing beside a body in the road, and the girl was trying to wave us down. I slowed and stopped.

"Something's happened to Jim," the girl wailed. "We were just taking a hike, and he grabbed his side and fell over and groaned. Can you get him to a doctor quick?"

"We can try," I said, and I leaned over to help Jim up.

But Jim sprang up of his own accord and thrust a revolver—which he had concealed under his prone body—in my face.

"Hands up, Grandpa," he snarled. "Hands up. Back up. Turn around. Kneel down. Put your hands behind you. Put the cuffs on him, Nellie Rose. Get out of the car, Grandma. Hurry up. Kneel down. Put the cuffs on her, too, Nellie Rose. Now both of you stay put till you count five hundred and twenty-seven."

Then he and the girl leaped into the Cadillac and drove off.

Jane and I helped each other to our feet. "Don't swear," said Jane. "It doesn't do any good. Somebody will catch them. Can you walk with your hands that way?"

"I think so," I said. "Can you get the cigarettes out of my pocket?"

She could and did, and we knelt

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down behind each other by turns to get lights from her cigarette lighter. But we couldn't flick ashes or manage the cigarettes after they were lighted, so we spat them out.

"This is a well-traveled road," said Jane. "Let's just start ambling toward town, and somebody will be along and pick us up in a jiffy."

"The Iowan's curse doesn't waste any time," I said. "You noticed, didn't you, how it took hold the moment we started to do what we thought was a favor for those delightful young people?"

"Yes, I noticed," said Jane. "And if an Iowan can make his curse stick, why can't I? I hereby put my curse upon both the young man and the young lady."

"So do I," I said. And I also said: "Look, there's a car coming. Wave your head at it or something so that the driver will stop and pick us up. I want to see the sheriff, the high sheriff, of this benighted county."

Jane waved her head; the car cut out to the side of the road to avoid us and barreled on past at fifty miles an hour.

"My, but people are accommodating in this country," said Jane.

"Maybe they, too, have also heard of the Iowan's curse," I said. "Chin up. Stride along. There will be more cars."

There were. There must have been seven more. And each one swerved and passed us as if we were exposed booby traps with warning flares on every side.

"Really," said Jane after a while, "that curse thing isn't as funny as I naïvely supposed it to be. How much farther is it to the vile little hamlet known as Manacle?"

"I can see its spires and towers now through the gentle desert haze," I said. "We will be there in a matter of minutes. This is the most horrible way to walk I have ever experienced. I ache from my shoulder blades to my heels. I have a headache. I need a drink. I shall not burden you now with how I feel about that adolescent bushwhacker and his scabrous camp follower."

"Tell me about the way the Chinese Communists torture people, dear," said Jane. So I told her about that until we entered the fringes of Manacle and found a house with a telephone. We kicked against the door because we could not knock, and the startled inmates summoned the authorities.

Tucson police caught the young couple who had robbed us of our Cadillac, but not before the young couple had run the Cadillac off the road and set it afire. The fellow and his girl were wanted on a homicide charge in California and were extradited there to stand trial, California's case having precedence over mine and Jane's. So we never had the

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pleasure of appearing as witnesses against them in court and watching them wince as the judge pronounced sentence. However, California was an able proxy for us. The young man was sentenced to death on the homicide charge, and the young lady was sent to a hospital for the ciminally insane. In a way we felt recompensed. The Cadillac's insurance provided us with a new Cadillac.

"See," I said to Jane, when the new Cadillac was delivered, "the Iowan's curse was only a transitory thing. In a way everything has turned out for the better."

"Uh huh," said Jane. "That reminds me. I didn't tell you about the men from the air base who were out here quail hunting, did I?"

"No," I said, still admiring the new Cadillac. "What about the quail hunters from the air base?"

"Well," said Jane, "when you were in town getting gasoline put in the new Cadillac there was some shooting in the direction of the Cathedral rock where you feed the quail. I went over there, and there were three airbase men, sergeants or something. They had killed a lot of quail; they had them in the jeep thing they were driving. I told them they were hunting on private property, which was against the law because the property was posted, but if they would just leave and not kill any more of our quail I would do them a favor and not take down the jeep thing's number and report them to the air base and also to the game warden."

"Hold it," I said. "You told them you would do them a favor?"

"Uh huh," said Jane. "And I nearly bit my tongue off after I did it."

"Well . . . go on," I said.

"They left," said Jane briefly. "They had been drinking. They called me Grandma and said a lot of insulting things about how I looked in my shorts. But they left."

"How did they get out?" I asked.

"Just like they got in," said Jane. "They drove their jeep thing right through our fence. There's two big crash-throughs in the fence now."

"Did you get their car number?" I demanded.

"No," said Jane. "That was just a bluff."

I put in a long-distance call to the air base, demanded to speak to the commanding officer, and was shunted over to some underling chicken colonel who was sincere but rather feeble. "We have over three thousand men here," he said. "It'll be hard to identify the ones you have accused from what you have told me. A lot of them go hunting, you know. But I'll try. I'll call you back if I can find out anything."

He called back the next day.

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He'd checked with the provost marshal, he said, and found that three enlisted men who had been quail hunting up in our neighborhood had met with an accident on their return to the base and were now in the base hospital suffering varying degrees of injuries. It seemed that the men had gotten drunk on the trip and had smacked their jeep into a bridge abutment. Two had spinal injuries and broken legs, and the third had a broken neck. The colonel asked if I wanted to prefer charges against them after the base medics got them patched up.

"No," I said. "Let it drop."

I told Jane what the colonel had reported, and I said: "Isn't there some theory or other about passive revenge? The idea that when somebody does you dirt, you don't actively do anything in return but just sit back and wait, and, sooner or later, Old Nobodaddy or the Sea Hag or the Norns catch up with them and deal it out good?"

"I don't remember reading anything like that," said Jane, "but it sounds reasonable. If the author wants any new case histories to use when he brings out a new edition of his theory we can give him some which will do for footnotes at the least."

"I'm disturbed," I said. "Nothing like this has ever happened to us before. The whole pattern seems so vicious. People go out of their way to injure us in some manner; we sit back in dismay and anger because we can do nothing about it, and then, bam! The sky caves in on them without our moving a finger. But why?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake," said Jane. "There have been some coincidences, and that's all. Our experience is probably universal. Don't make so much over it. Stop acting as if there's a big eye up there somewhere brooding over our next moves and tentatively pulling the strings of its evil puppets."

"I cannot deny the reasonableness of your conclusions," I sighed. "But, nevertheless, I do not care to mix again with the human species—yourself excepted—for a spate of days. Gather up your paints and your easel, and I will gather up some suet, crusts, and bird seed. Let us go out amidst our ten acres, you to paint its beauties, and I to feed its avians. There, let the eye brood down upon us; let the Iowan brew his curses as he wills."

"You pompous old fool!" said Jane. "But it is a good idea. Come on, let's go."

In the sunlight among the mesquite and paloverde trees, the world was at her loveliest that gentle autumn afternoon. I spread out some viands for the desert birds and sprawled beside Jane as she daubed with her colors. We had brought along a lunch basket and some cans of beer.

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"I had a letter yesterday," said Jane chattily, "from Mrs. So-and-so in Tucson. They are trying to start up a new art gallery there, and she said the hanging committee would consider it a great favor if I would submit some of my paintings for their first exhibit. She mentioned 'Caverns' particularly. You know, the one which won the prize in Chicago."

"A hanging committee asked you to do it a favor?" I shuddered. "No, Jane, no! A thousand times no. The potentialities are just too horrible."

She hit me lightly with a paint brush, and we laughed.

But presently she stopped laughing. "Darn you," she said; "now I am afraid to send them my paintings. But how silly. They are nice people."

"Oh, I was only joking," I said. "We are not misanthropic hermits in hiding from every manifestation of our kind. You *will* be doing them a favor. The Tucson artists are not fleeing felons or drunken airmen."

I arose to get us each a can of beer, and, as I did so, I dislodged a flat rock. The dislodgement disclosed a little straw-colored scorpion which had been nesting there. He waved his crab-like pincers in dismay at being disturbed.

"Tiny fiend," I said, "on an afternoon such as this, even against you I bear no animosity. Return to your haven and slumber again in peace." And I carefully put the rock down upon him.

"Stand beside that big mesquite," Jane directed. "I want to paint a faun among the brambles. I have the brambles; now I need the faun."

So, with a beer can in one hand and a cigarette in the other, I posed faunlike beside the big mesquite tree; and I could hear the birds quarrel as they pecked at the food I had placed for them.

Then Jane, who worked rapidly, sketched in her faun among the brambles, and told me I might stop the posing; and I returned to her side and lay down upon the warm desert soil.

I felt a stab between my shoulder blades and then pain such as if a thousand bees had stung me. It was radiating pain, and made me vomit. In my agony I tramped upon the little scorpion which had bitten me; then Jane helped me back to our house.

My arms were paralyzed, and my legs went dead just as Jane was able to get me in the car. With one hand she held a handkerchief full of ice cubes against the spot where I had been stung; with the other hand she drove the Cadillac.

At the clinic in Manacle they injected me with that blessed antiscorpion serum which Dr. Stahnke, the genius at the state college in Tempe, had developed. I was in

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the hospital overnight; and Jane took me home the next day. Three days later I was my old self again.

"I had a siege of hysterics when you were in the hospital," Jane said. "And I'm not an hysterical woman. I'm not superstitious, either. And I'm not crazy. But I'm not going to send any paintings to that Tucson show."

"Are you afraid?" I asked.

"Yes. I am afraid."

And we let it go at that. But our days became rather snarled affairs. It was almost as if we were getting on each other's nerves, we who had been married so long that we were as one person, never saying anything without saying it to the other, never making a decision without making it with the other, never doing anything without doing it with the other. Never sleeping, eating, rising, traveling, dreaming, or praying as one alone but always with the other. This was our harmony and our strength.

Finally Jane said: "This is awful. Are you afraid of doing *me* a favor?"

"I was afraid," I said slowly, "that you were afraid that I *might* do you a favor."

Then we both laughed, and the tension of days was eased.

She said: "We have been making mountains out of molehills. We are selfish people. We have always considered our own lives and our own felicity as paramount to everything. We have always repelled the encroachment of others."

"I think it is being brought home to us," I replied, "that our tower of selfishness is not inviolable. Perhaps it is a lesson we have needed for a long time."

"Perhaps," agreed Jane. "Or, on the other hand, perhaps the whole concatenation has been nothing but nonsense. Let's start going out again just as if nothing had happened. I will call Mrs. So-and-so in Tucson and tell her I'll be delighted to enter my pictures in their show. And you can drive us to Tucson, and we will enter them. That is something neither of us wants to do, because I am sensitive about my paintings and resent any criticism of them, and you hate affairs of the sort—cocktail parties, mingling, chitchat. So let's go. Let's do something we don't like and see what happens."

I started to protest, then found myself in agreement with her. For it was necessary that we did do something, and not sit there any longer in our ten acres trying not to get on each other's nerves.

Jane called Mrs. So-and-so in Tucson who was delighted with the news. Next day we put the pictures in the Cadillac, and I drove us down to Tucson.

There is only the one road, and it goes through Manacle. The streets were dilapidated but pretty enough in their soft decaying way, lined as they were with crumbly

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adobe houses and shoddy little businesses. Then we drove through Manacle's subdivision—Sunrise Heights—built by the government to house the defense plant workers which Manacle itself could not accommodate.

Tumbleweeds and old papers blew through Sunrise Heights. The windows in the once neat little houses had been smashed by rocks, thrown no doubt by roving bands of Manacle's young manhood. The roofs were cracking, the paint fading and peeling in the remorseless sun. Manacle itself was nearly one hundred years old, and bore its age—and its disgrace—with a sort of sullen dignity. Its subdivision of Sunrise Heights was only ten years old; now dead, it resembled a toy a somewhat delinquent child had abused.

Neither of us wanted to mention the Iowan. What would have been the point? The defense plant was closed because the weapon it had manufactured had become obsolete. Sunrise Heights was empty because the people who had lived there had been forced to go elsewhere to find employment. The young marauders from Manacle had wrecked the Sunrise Heights windows because Manacle was a dull place, and there was nothing else to do.

The fact that a grumpy old Iowan had cursed the place had nothing to do with it . . . nothing.

Or to do with us.

So we drove on to Tucson and found the house where our hostess lived, Mrs. So-and-so who had asked Jane to do the artist group a favor by lending her paintings for the exhibit.

We were to stay two nights, attending the show the first night and being entertained the second day and night. There was a trip to Nogales, Mexico, planned for us, and a reception and cocktail party.

The art show, the reception, and the cocktail party were much as I had expected they would be—rather strained and artificial. Jane's paintings, as far as I could see, were the only ones of merit in the show, except some by Mark Voris, who was then as always Arizona's finest painter.

But I had been looking forward to the trip to Nogales. It would be our first visit to Mexico; and old travelers always enjoy seeing new countries.

Our hosts and Jane and I decided to go in our Cadillac, because the car was roomy and I liked to drive. We set out in the afternoon, an afternoon of gold and silver and green, and our hearts were light.

We paused not at all in Nogales, Arizona, but crossed over immediately to the Mexican Nogales. Jane and our hostess began a round of the curio shops, those curiously-alike little cubicles with

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their curiously-alike wares and their curiously-alike methods of bargaining. Are they all owned by the same person, and is the competition nothing but sham? One wonders.

Our host and I found without difficulty a little drinking place, and sipped tequila sours while the ladies bought their jimcrack curios. The tequila was good, but there was a shoddy cheapness about the town which depressed me. I had a vague, uncomfortable feeling of being cheated whenever I paid out money for anything there.

A little boy came in the bar where we sat, stood by diffidently for a moment, and then in rather good English offered to guard the Cadillac for us. I laughed and asked our host: (1) Was it necessary to have one's car guarded in this country, and (2) Was it customary?

Our host laughed in return and said that while he couldn't speak for the necessity it was, nevertheless, more or less customary; people were wretchedly poor here as a rule, the little boys made a sort of living "guarding" tourists' cars, and I would probably be doing the lad's family a favor in paying him to guard mine.

I winced at that remark. Had I had a little more tequila, I probably would have become angry and cursed both our host and the cringing little boy. But I had had only enough tequila to make me feel genial, so I said: "Well, child, guard the car, but don't get your dirty finger prints on it," and I gave him a dime. He left with an odd look on his face.

Jane and our hostess, after an interminable time, finished their shopping, looked us up, and announced it was time for dinner. We put their purchases in the Cadillac and went off to a restaurant for some genuine Mexican food.

We had enchiladas and tamales and dishes of that sort, and more to drink. I enjoyed the meal; Jane chattered like a magpie; we were having a very good time.

Then horrid things began to happen.

After dinner as I drove back toward Tucson, I was halted by highway patrolmen on the way, and cited for speeding, drunken driving, and endangering human lives. The officers ordered me out of the driver's seat and ordered our host to drive the remainder of the way. They admonished me to appear in court the next morning.

I appeared in traffic court—our host driving me there in his car—and was fined one hundred dollars, but was allowed to keep my driver's license and to escape a jail term because of extenuating circumstances.

When we returned, our hostess asked in trembling fashion if I had looked at the Cadillac. I replied

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with an irritable no and asked what was wrong with it. Mutely, she led me out.

All the knickknacks she and Jane had bought had been stolen. So had the hubcaps. The rear tires had been slashed, but had held up. The paint along the sides had been scored as if with a beer can opener. Obscene words in both Spanish and English had been daubed on the back.

All this had happened in Mexico, but such had been our travail that it had gone unnoticed till our hostess had gone out to get her purchases.

"But I thought," protested Jane, "that you paid a little boy to watch the car."

"I did," I said. "I did it as a favor. We did everybody a favor, now that I think back."

We went back to our ten acres at Manacle as soon as feasible, driving past the dead defense plant, past the withering Sunrise Heights, and through the malignant heart of Manacle. It was a very gray day; our ten acres looked wistful and unhappy; the outcropped rock "Cathedral" looked like a decayed and aching tooth.

"Let's move," said Jane. "I can't stand it any longer. Let's get away from here. I have begun to hate, and I don't like to hate."

"I'll put up the place for sale," I said. "I'll order a truck. We can start packing today. We can be gone in two days. Where do you want to go?"

"New York, I guess," said Jane gloomily. "For a while at least. To a hotel. Where I can think."

I called our realty broker in Tucson and told him to put our place on the market. I called a van line and told them to send a van around the next day to pick up our stuff and put it in storage.

"It won't take two days," I told Jane. "We can leave tomorrow. We will be doing ourselves and this place, too, a favor."

Jane brightened up.

The air outside became gusty; rain began to fall. I built a fire in our fireplace, and I brought out a bottle of German wine. We toasted the imminence of our departure, and, as the rain poured down with new intensity, dared the elements to do their worst.

The elements accepted the dare.

Rains in that part of Arizona are always sparse affairs, and a half-inch precipitation is accounted almost a cloudburst.

This time it rained that half-inch in less than half an hour, and still the inundation kept pouring from the skies.

I looked out the door, and the water was gathered in ponds all over our front yard; the patio was full of water; the Cadillac stood in water up to its whitewalls in the ramada. There was no wind, and there was no break in the sky.

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There was only blackness and furious, unceasing rain.

The land was flat; there was no place for the rain to go after it fell; it piled up and made ponds and lakes in every little declivity and every hollow.

I returned to Jane and the fireplace and the wine. But I was uneasy and after fifteen minutes I went again to the door and again looked out.

The water was over our porch step. Everywhere I looked was water. The Cadillac was hubcap deep in water under the ramada.

Then I became afraid, and I told Jane we were on the verge of being flooded out.

"Nothing would surprise me less," she snapped. "But what can we do about it?"

That was the point. What could we do? We couldn't get anywhere in the Cadillac; it was already bogged. The nearest habitation to ours was more than a mile away and was unquestionably in similar plight. And then I remembered what I had read about flash floods: The water piles up in some hitherto dry mountain gulch or gulley, then suddenly bursts out and swamps the lowlands with a roar. All this rain was piling up in the mountains north of us; the drainage flowed our way; it was only a matter of time until a whole wild sea would be upon us.

"Come," I said to Jane. "We've got to go." And I explained the situation to her.

"But where can we go?" she protested.

There was only one place. That was the rock outcropping on our acres, the ugly "Cathedral." It was thirty feet high. It would be a place of refuge. We put on our raincoats and hats, as if we were going to the store, and waded—sometimes knee-deep—to the Cathedral. We climbed its rocky side and sat upon its top; and the rain poured down.

We sat there all that night. When dawn came we watched the flash flood come with it—nothing really flashy, just a swell and a billow that surged across the lake which already covered our ten acres and all the surrounding land. The Cadillac rolled over on its side and wobbled helplessly. Our house disintegrated a wall at a time; our things floated, a chair here, a paper there.

Around eight o'clock the rain stopped. About noon a helicopter fluttered by and rescued Jane and me. Nearly ten inches of rain had fallen. It was the worst flood ever recorded in that part of Arizona.

After our rescue everyting became rather academic. We refugeed for two days in Manacle which was on high ground and escaped most of the flood. When the water went down we hired a man to drive us to Tucson where we

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would catch plane, train, or even bus to get us out and to keep us going.

As he drove us along the road to Tucson, our man companionably pointed out the high points of the flood's devastation. "Over there," he said, indicating the remnants of a house, "was where an old grouch from Iowa lived. But he'd already left before the rain started."

"What caused him to do that?" I asked.

"Termites," said our driver. "They had eat out the wood of his whole house, even the pitcher frames. Man, did that old grouch cuss this country when he left!"

"I can imagine," I said.

Invest in the future . . .

We are very pleased to announce that a new story by Charles G. Finney will be along shortly. It is called "The Gilashrikes," and perhaps the best description of it is that it lives up to its title. . . . That in itself is very nearly adequate reason to fill in the coupon below. Another, of course, is that by so doing, you guarantee receiving both installments of Robert A. Heinlein's driving, fascinating, and controversial new novel, "Starship Soldier," which F&SF will bring you later this year. Join us?

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Production Problem

THE MAN FROM TIMESEARCH, nc. is here, sir."

"Show him in," Bridgemaker old the robutler.

The man from Timesearch ıalted just within the doorway. Nervously he shifted the oblong ɔackage he was carrying from one ıand to the other. "Good morn-ng, Honorable Bridgemaker."

"Did you find the machine?" 3ridgemaker demanded.

"I—I'm afraid we failed again, ir. But we did locate another one ɔf its products." The man handed 3ridgemaker the package.

Bridgemaker waved his arm in ın angry gesture that included he whole room. "But you've al-eady brought me hundreds of its ɔroducts!" he shouted. "What I vant is the machine itself so I can nake my own products!"

"I'm afraid, Honorable Bridge-naker, that the machine never xisted. Our field men have ex-ɔlored the Pre-Technological Age, he First Technological Age, and he early years of our own age; ɔut even though they witnessed ome of the ancient technicians ıt work, they never caught a glimpse of the machine."

"But if the ancient technicians ɔould create something without a nachine, *I* could too," Bridge-naker said. "And since I can't, he machine *had* to exist. Go back ınd find it! Go back at once!"

"Yes, Honorable Bridgemaker." The man bowed and withdrew.

Bridgemaker tore open the package. He glanced at the prod-uct, then set the controls on his Language Adjustor, Duplicator and Alterator machine.

While he waited, he brooded on the irony of his life. Ever since he was a small boy he had hun-gered hopelessly for one vocation. Now that success in a totally different vocation had made him financially independent, he had focused all his energies into the attainment of his first love. But all he'd got for his trouble was a roomful of ancient products, and even though he'd increased his financial independence by dupli-cating and distributing those products, the basic frustration still remained: he was a second-hand artist and he wanted desperately to be a first-hand artist.

He went over to one of the shelves that wainscoted the room and glanced at some of his vicari-ous creations: *Farewell to Arms,* by Chamfer Bridgemaker . . . *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew,* by Chamfer Bridgemaker . . . *The Odyssey,* by Chamfer Bridgemaker . . . *Ivanhoe,* by Chamfer Bridgemaker—

There was a loud *plop!* as the first copy of *Tom Swift and His Electric Locomotive* came out of the Language Adjustor, Duplica-tor and Alterator machine.

Bridgemaker sat down to read his latest masterpiece.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG

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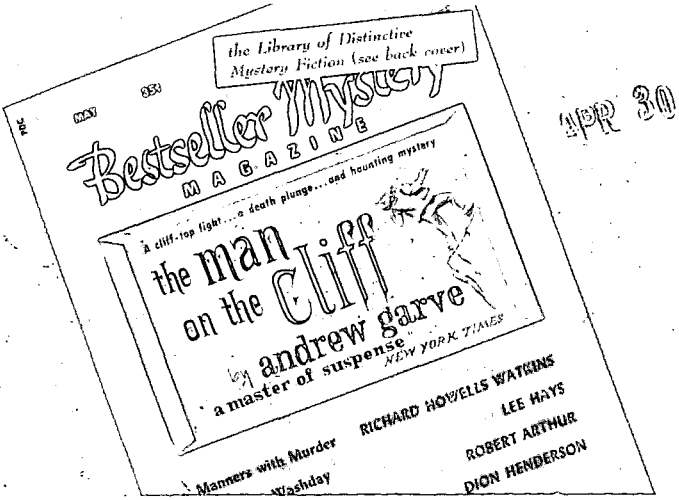

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